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1. Marriage and say I'm not alone,
2. Yours and one shall be mine
One heart, one mind,
-A story like that, my love,
Lies where no man will ever
No man can find."



R H O N A.

VOL. II.

2

R H O N A

BY

MRS. FORRESTER

AUTHOR OF

“VIVA,” “MIGNON,” “DOLORES,” “DIANA CAREW,”
&c., &c.

“Land me, she says, where love
Shows but one shaft, one dove,
One heart, one hand.
—A shore like that, my dear,
Lies where no man will steer,
No maiden land.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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R H O N A.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHAIN BEGINS TO GALL.

FOR some weeks after Colonel Dorian's return from Ireland, nothing could have been happier than the little *ménage* in May Fair. Rhona was radiant at the recovery of her treasure, feeling that until he had been parted from her, she had not realised how unutterably dear he was to her, and George himself felt that the word home was associated with considerable arms.

The days sped on and brought lovely fine weather, and brought, alas ! the day

when rent is demanded and bills come flowing in, and once more George stood face to face with his embarrassments and liabilities. The bills came in and he had not the money to pay them. Many men can meet such a situation with perfect *sang-froid* when they know the money will be ultimately forthcoming, and many, unfortunately, can treat the matter with equal carelessness and lightness of heart when they have no such cheering conviction. A good many men would have paid part of the bills and frankly explained to the tradesmen that it would be inconvenient to be pressed for the rest—others would have taken no further notice than to fling the bills behind the fire with an impatient anathema. Not so George Dorian who was scrupulously honourable in money matters and considered it a degradation to be unable to pay a bill the moment it was presented. Nay, more, he pronounced it absolutely dishonest to possess anything for which you

could not there and then put your hand in your pocket and pay. And he was right. If people acted more generally upon this principle, they would save themselves a great many heart-burnings and would also be able to enjoy, not only the comfort of an easy mind, but a good many more actual comforts and luxuries than they do now. George had been led into this Slough of Despond, as he considered it, by his own and his wife's ignorance, and, if he blamed his own folly, he did not spare hers. She ought to have got advice from her friends. Mrs. Anderson was a practical woman enough, why had she not warned and cautioned her niece before she undertook the grave responsibilities of house taking and keeping?

Colonel Dorian said angrily to himself that women had not a proper sense of honour or honesty—he was quite indignant to see how coolly Rhona took the fact of their indebtedness. But she, poor girl, was

in reality very little to blame in the matter. She was as honest at heart as George—she would have worked her fingers to the bone rather than defraud any human being of a penny. But she had not been brought up to think it criminal to leave a bill unpaid for six, or even twelve months. Her uncle, like a great many other rich men, though perfectly liberal in his establishment, was not fond of parting with his money—nothing incensed him like being “dunned,” and many a time had Rhona heard him inveigh against the impertinence of tradesmen who were in a hurry to be paid. She, quite innocently, made her husband furious one day by expressing a modified form of Mr. Anderson’s sentiments.

Colonel Dorian was harassed beyond measure to know what to do. All his capital was strictly tied up—so was Rhona’s—to borrow the money seemed to him like robbing Peter to pay Paul—there was only one thing for it—to save the money out of his

income. At the rate they were living now, there seemed very little chance of that. He had resolved, after the season, to sell both his horses, and to make a severe struggle to economise—as it was, he would hardly spend a sixpence on himself, and not the least of his vexations was this new sensation of having to look at a shilling before he spent it, and feeling it a duty to walk instead of taking a hansom. Single, he had been a rich man on two thousand a year, since he did not bet or gamble—married, he felt himself not only a pauper, but a thief. He began to get frightfully irritable, and Rhona of course was the victim of his temper. If he had talked the matter gently over with her, she, being eminently reasonable, and having a strong sense of justice, besides loving him devotedly, would have met him more than half way, and been only too glad to do anything to lighten his cares, but he adopted quite another course. He refrained from alluding, except once now and again,

to his embarrassments, but railed against marriage, against fate, against town life, against women, and nearly broke Rhona's heart by the cruelty and injustice of his speeches. He did not keep them only for home use, but many a time when they were out dining together, or had friends at their own table, she would catch sound of some of his bitter and cynical remarks, and she would feel an agony of pain, shame, and resentment, and got presently to dread being in public with him.

After one of his tirades she would assume a cold and injured manner towards him, and he, not pausing to consider that he had been the aggressor, not even knowing, perhaps, how he had wounded her, came to the conclusion that she had "an infernal temper," and that all her former sweetness and kindness had only been put on with a view of ensnaring and deluding him.

"I was quite right," he said to himself savagely, "in my former ideas of women

and marriage. To think I should ever have been such a fool as to let myself get caught!"

One day they came to a supreme quarrel over, (as it often happens), a very trifling matter. They were going to have a small dinner-party, and drove to Covent Garden together to purchase some dessert. Rhona's ideas, from association, were rather on a large scale. When one has been accustomed to sit at a table laden with hot-house fruits and flowers, one gets a sort of idea that these luxuries are almost common necessaries. She hinted something about a pine which George imperiously tabooed at once; then she suggested grapes, but he declared them quite unnecessary. Finally she came down, (a little put out), to strawberries. Of these she chose two very fine baskets, but her husband whispered angrily that he could not and would not pay such a ridiculous price as that demanded for them, and observed that some others which

he pointed out would do perfectly well. Rhona, indignant, declared that she would not put such things upon her table, and her husband retorted that he most certainly would not pay for the others, whereupon Mrs. Dorian, who had a fine spirit, pulled out her purse and bought the forbidden fruit there and then, and her husband, in a fury, turned upon his heel and left her standing alone with her strawberries.

They did not meet again until dinner. The heart of each was full of anger, and Colonel Dorian out-did himself in the bitterness of his sarcasms, while Rhona sat like a martyr at the stake with shining eyes and a bright red spot on either cheek, trying hard to smile and play the hostess gracefully, whilst she was suffering torments from the inhuman cruelty of her lord. Lady Chaloner was one of the guests, and Colonel Dorian so comported himself towards her as to add to all his wife's other sufferings the torture of jealousy. It was on this occasion that she

learned to appreciate Sir Philip, who, seeing how matters stood, exerted himself to the utmost to divert her attention, and was so kind and genial, so warm in his praise of everything connected with her house, that she reserved for him ever afterwards a warm corner in her heart.

Womanlike, Rhona could not pass over her husband's conduct without remark, and determined when their guests were gone to seek an explanation. Colonel Dorian, having revenged himself, was prepared to be content, and to behave as though nothing had happened ; so when Rhona, with angry tears, demanded the reason of his cruelty to her, he only replied by silence and a derisive smile. Then for the first time, in the exceeding bitterness of her heart, she gave vent to her anger and misery and said things to him which she was but too ready to repent later. She asked him what right he had to marry her if he only intended to make her wretched ? and he replied, brutally enough,

that he wished to God he had never set eyes on her, and that if she had not been such an adept at deceit, she would never have entrapped him—that he had been happy until he married her, but that now what with her temper and her extravagance his life was h— to him, and he saw nothing in front of him but wretchedness and despair. Whereupon he went out, slammed the door, rolled himself in a rug and in ten minutes was sound asleep on the floor of his dressing-room, whilst Rhona spent the night-watches in an agony of sobs and tears.

If one has a fine spirit, one ought to have “the courage of it,” but this is exactly what a sensitive woman lacks. She can lash herself up to say bitter things; even to contemplate acts of bitter reprisal, but when her first anger has evaporated, nothing but grief and repentance is left. She cannot bear to remain in a state of strife with the man she loves—if he holds aloof and refuses to come to terms, ten to one but she will end by

confessing herself in the wrong only to make the quarrel up. Rhona had a good heart—she could forgive and forget words spoken to her in anger however bitter or unjust. Not so her husband. If he said a thing he meant it, and never repented it, nor did he ever forget or forgive an offence against himself. So, in a quarrel between the two, it will be pretty easy to conjecture who came off the victor.

After a day or two of coolness this quarrel was arranged, and Rhona, having suffered intensely, proceeded to do her best to prevent any recurrence of it. In George's recriminations, her extravagance and his anxiety about money matters had played so large a part that she was not slow to grasp the truth, and determined to do all in her power to curtail their expenditure. Many and wonderful were the schemes she planned for raising money and ridding him of his embarrassments, but unfortunately none of them were practical. She was for putting

down her carriage at once, but Colonel Dorian had no idea of taking the world into confidence about his private affairs, and thought it better to wait until the end of the season. Rhona went so ardently to work in household reforms that the cook, in high dudgeon, gave warning, seeing that the situation was likely to prove less lucrative than it had promised. It was grief and woe to Rhona's liberal heart to wear even the smallest semblance of meanness, but was not her one object, one pleasure, one duty in life to please her lord?

Though the latter gave her a certain amount of credit for her intentions, he was still suffering from the pressure of the unpaid bills, and his temper remained in a very irritable state. He was angry with himself for feeling irritable—it was quite a new sensation to him, and he threw all the blame of his ruined temper upon marriage and his wife. Having broken the ice and talked at her, and occasionally with bitterness to



her, it was natural that he should find the habit difficult to drop, and Rhona presently came to the agonised conviction that his love for her was melting away. Such was not really the case—he was still very fond of her, and if she could only have determined and acted upon the determination neither to resent nor to take to heart observations not actually addressed to her ; if she could have always met him with smiles ; could have behaved as though everything he said and did were right, and could have seemed pleased that he should take delight in the society and conversation of other women, why, no doubt he would have been still fonder of her, and have considered her a most desirable wife. But, pray, what woman who really loves a man can do all that ! When she is capable of behaving in the way I have described, let her husband look to it ! let him not imagine that he reigns in that patient, long-suffering breast ; let him not lull himself to a false security

because she makes the way seem so smooth for him—if a woman loves a man, and he plays tricks with her love, he must walk for ever on the brink of a volcano ; when there is no longer danger, it is because the fire is extinct.

Lay that to heart, husbands who outrage your wives' feelings, and yet see them smiling and complaisant ; they can endure because they are indifferent—perhaps they get sympathy elsewhere—if they do, however, they refrain from proclaiming it as you do on the house-top.

Colonel Dorian had resumed his charming manner to women—the time had gone by when he was so absorbed with one of the sex that he could scarcely bring himself to take an interest in the society of any other. Why, pray, because he was fond of his wife, should he not find it pleasant to talk to and look at other women ? I acquit him of the faintest thought of treachery to Rhona : it had always been his way to

caress women with his eyes and voice, however indifferent an opinion he may have entertained of them at heart. Poor Rhona could not endure this—it tormented her cruelly ; if she saw him sitting apart on a sofa with a woman talking to her in a low voice and looking at her intently, (this was only a little way he had), it caused her an agony of jealousy. She could not help it—she loved him, and it was her nature. I would indeed blame her severely for this, and take her off the pedestal upon which I present her to you as my heroine, only that I know that this agonising disorder which evokes the mirth of fools is productive of most cruel torment to the sufferer, and is indeed purely involuntary. And I may safely assert that if her husband had been uniformly kind and tender to her, had shown her consistently by his manner that he was devoted to her, had never slighted her before others, and never made himself conspicuously agreeable to any other mem-

ber of her sex, Rhona was not foolish enough to have tormented and made herself miserable entirely without cause. She argued to herself that he was all-in-all to her; that there breathed no other man whom she cared to look at or talk to save in the most ordinary of friendly manners—her eyes, her lips, her heart were his; and if he loved her with an equal love, she must be all-in-all to him.

Such slavery, however, is not agreeable to some men—it was certainly not so to Colonel Dorian, who held the opinion that husbands and wives should go their own way in society, and never take the slightest notice of each other before the world. Everyone regards things from his own point of view—this was George's. He had completely sacrificed himself to Rhona, (time has toned down in his memory the eagerness with which he sought her), has endowed her with all his worldly goods, leaving himself poor indeed—has given up his free-

dom, the delights of change and travel, and has tied himself down to a place and a life that he hates. Ought she not to show him common gratitude by making things smooth and pleasant for him?—ought she not to show her appreciation of his sacrifices by being always smiling and satisfied? Was it not odious on her part to want to parade him before the world as a captive chained to her car?—was it not too absurd that she should sulk and give herself jealous airs if he spoke to another woman? He allowed her perfect freedom—she might talk to his friends as much as she liked—it would never give him a shadow of uneasiness.

It is, however, very easy to boast of the latitude you allow people when you know there is not the faintest chance of their taking advantage of it, and I am disposed to think that had Rhona gone off for a fortnight to amuse herself, leaving him alone, or had she whispered in a corner with good-looking men and sneered at mar-

riage in his presence, he might, after all, have thought himself not a little injured.

One thing is deeply to be regretted—that Rhona should not have possessed a little more discernment, but that quality demands a cool head and a cool heart, and how is this to be expected from a woman who loves and who is prone to be jealous?

Rhona had no earthly right or occasion to be jealous of Mrs. Orme, and yet she was. Nella, with her tact, good sense, and sympathetic nature, would have been an invaluable friend, but Mrs. Dorian repulsed her efforts by a coldness and a little air of distant *hauteur* that were eminently trying to Nella. If I relate two incidents by which fuel was added to the flame of Rhona's feeling against that lady, I shall, I fear, make the gentle reader think she is scarcely deserving of much sympathy. One afternoon Colonel Dorian came home and announced that he had taken three stalls at the French play for that evening. He had met Mrs. Orme,

and she having expressed a wish to see the piece, he had at once proposed that she should join them and go that evening, as neither had any engagement.

Rhona was still foolish enough and in love enough to think two better company than three—however she made no demur. But, (and this, I know, will for ever shut up the heart of the fashionable reader against her), she actually expected her husband to sit next her, and was so intensely mortified and disappointed when he placed Mrs. Orme between them that she could scarcely keep the tears from her eyes, and no effort of Nella would induce her to smile, or to enter into cheerful conversation. George made matters worse by taking no notice of her, and devoting himself to his old friend. Rhona had a fit of crying on her return home, and her husband felt himself the most injured creature in the whole of Christendom. There is no doubt that to be exacting is not only the greatest fault a

woman can have in a man's eyes, but is a crown of thorns to herself.

Instance number two—which, as I desire to set out my history impartially, I feel compelled to relate—was as follows. One day at lunch Rhona expressed a wish to go to the Royal Academy and asked George to accompany her. He replied, with scant graciousness, that pictures bored him to death, and that, besides, he had other things to do.

Rhona bit her lip, and said, rather loftily, that in that case she would go alone. Now very few women, after a year or two of marriage, would think of being put out because their husbands demurred to accompany them to a picture gallery, but we must remember that Rhona was only a bride of six months standing, and that Colonel Dorian had been a very devoted lover indeed. Rhona was very far from intending to carry out the determination she announced, but as she uttered it with great resolution, how

was her husband to know this? Presently he went out, and about an hour later Colonel Ormond was announced. Curiously enough the conversation fell upon pictures. Jack asked whether Rhona had yet been to the Academy, and she answered,

“No.”

“Always the way,” he remarked, “when one lives within a stone’s throw of a place one is sure never to go to it. I have not been either. Why not go this afternoon, and let us get it off our minds?” he suggested.

Rhona thought it would be an excellent plan. A slight sense of pique against her husband made the proposal still more attractive. So she put on her bonnet, and they started. Jack was the only man in London she would have thought it quite *en règle* to go out with—he was her husband’s bosom friend.

Colonel Ormond was charmed. Next to Nella, there was no woman whose society

so delighted him as Mrs. Dorian's. He proved a most attentive squire—was indefatigable in comparing the numbers of the pictures with their names in the book, and Rhona was in a very bright humour when—something she saw suddenly caused her to stop short, to colour deeply and to experience a violent pulsing of her heart. This agitating sight was none other than her husband carefully performing for Mrs. Orme the same good office that Jack was engaged upon for her. Instantly, she jumped to every conclusion but the right one. George had declined to accompany her because he was already engaged to Nella—it was the prospect of her company not the pictures that bored him, etc., etc. The fact was this. Colonel Dorian, repenting him a little of not having acceded to his wife's request and thinking that she might have gone alone as she threatened, betook himself to the Academy and proceeded to look round the rooms for her. Just as he had completed

the circuit without success he met Nella coming in alone and at once joined her.

Almost at the same moment as Rhona, Jack caught sight of the pair.

“By Jove! there’s Gustav and with Nella!” he exclaimed. “‘Doth not a meeting like this make amends?’”

Rhona did not seem to think it did, for after standing a moment irresolute whilst the other couple, who had become aware of their presence, were advancing towards them, she said suddenly,

“I don’t want to speak to them. Please come with me!” and darted off into the next room, Jack following ruefully.

Colonel Dorian flushed with displeasure and Nella looked dismayed—there was no mistaking the fact that Rhona intended to avoid them.

“George!” whispered Nella, “please leave me now and join them!”

“I’ll be something if I do!” responded he with bitter emphasis.

“I do not know why,” said Nella, “but it is evident that for some reason or other your wife does not like me. I believe, wild as the idea seems, she is a little jealous of me.”

“She is jealous of everyone,” replied Colonel Dorian impatiently.

“That is because she is so devoted to you.”

“I don’t know *why* it is, but it will soon be the curse of my life,” (angrily).

“At all events you have the remedy in your own hands,” said Nella, who possessed the immense virtue of being loyal to her own sex, “let her see that you care for no one but her and her jealousy will soon be cured effectually.”

“If one began by humouring a woman’s follies and caprices, one would soon be the most contemptible miserable wretch upon earth.”

“Oh, in moderation, I mean. But still, consider, when you are married, your home

and your wife are the two things upon which your comfort depends, and is it not better to make a little sacrifice to insure your happiness in these?"

"A little sacrifice! That would soon come to giving up every friend I have in the world—you amongst them."

"I would rather you gave me up a thousand times than cause your wife any unhappiness. She is very young, remember, and utterly devoted to you. In a year or two's time, she will see things in a different light, but don't estrange her affections now by seeming to give her cause for complaint. After all, you know, she is more to you than the whole world beside—you married her for love, and if her only weakness is putting so high a value on you, you ought to be the last to complain."

"But women are so infernally unreasonable! some women. Why should I not take it into my head to be annoyed because I meet her here with Jack?"

“Because,” answers Nella, “you *know* that the handsomest, the most fascinating man in the world could not shake her allegiance to you. Unfortunately for her, you are the only man in the world in her eyes.”

George is slightly mollified. Though he is not to be induced to join his wife at the Academy, he forbears to reproach her when they meet, and actually takes the trouble to explain to her that he had gone there on purpose to meet her, and having been the round of the rooms without finding her, had joined Mrs. Orme.

Rhona is exceedingly contrite; makes humble apologies, and promises never, never to be so foolish again. For she has an excellent heart, and is always very sorry and much ashamed after having been betrayed into an ebullition of temper, and can confess with the best grace in the world that she has been wrong. George is restored with honour to his pinnacle in the

temple of her heart, and the only person who suffers in her esteem, (most unjustly, as we know), is Nella.

CHAPTER II.

COURTSHIP WITHOUT LOVE.

I HAVE some fresh introductions to make to the reader. Fancy that you are strolling with me through a magnificent avenue of trees to yonder quaint Elizabethan mansion. Cross the drawbridge, walk under the big archway, and we are in a large flagged court. Traverse this and enter the fine hall whose door stands wide open. It is a grand old hall, wainscoted with black oak, and has an old-fashioned high chimney-piece. In the panels are portraits, some of them of considerable merit and beauty. The space between the wainscot and carved ceiling is filled with rich mouldings, in

which the arms of the house appear at equidistances. There is a magnificent mullioned window composed of shields of stained glass in the most gorgeous colours. When the sun shines, you might fancy yourself with Aladdin in the Magician's cave, to see the polished oak floor strewn apparently with gems of rarest colour. But we have no time to linger here—let us open the inner door, and we shall find the party of whom we are in search. A charming room this: it has three deep embrasured windows with cushioned seats where it is delicious to lie and look down at the clear water in the broad moat, and then across to the quaint Dutch flower-garden with its fancifully cut yews, strips of green turf, and patches of bright colour. The room is occupied by four ladies—the Countess Valentine, her two daughters, Lady Ruth and Lady Barbara Ormond, and Pauline Lemercier.

Lady Valentine has been handsome—she has a kindly look in her face that tones

down a certain proud stateliness natural to her. Lady Ruth, or Rue, as she is always called, is the most piquante creature possible to conceive—her sister is small, pale, with an expression half of pain, half of weariness, engendered by suffering, and Pauline, who is gazing with such rapt eyes away yonder without seeming to see anything, looks rather like a denizen of dream-land.

Lady Rue is lying in one of the windows playing with a little dog. She bears an extraordinary likeness to a portrait of the lovely Duchess of Portsmouth, that hangs in the hall. The same pouting, rosy mouth, the fine delicate nose, the long, bewitching, almond-shaped eyes. If she were dressed in the flowing robes, (which always fill one's mind with wonder to know how the fair wearers kept them on), the illusion would be complete. Fortunately for Lady Rue's comfort, she wears a pale blue muslin of simplest make, and capacity for adjustment.

Lady Valentine is in the act of opening a telegram.

“Val will be here to-night,” she announces; then, turning to the servant—

“Order the dog-cart to meet Lord Valentine by the 6.5. train. Or, stay,” (addressing her daughter), “will you drive the ponies and meet him?”

Lady Rue shakes her head.

The man departs. Rue yawns—then she pouts her lovely mouth and says, with an air of extreme dejection,

“What a bore to be engaged to a man, when you don’t care two straws about him! I am not the least pleased that he is coming and I shouldn’t be one atom disappointed if he sent another telegram to say he had changed his mind.”

“Rue!” murmurs her mother with a little frown indicating Pauline by a glance.

“Pauline is away in dream-land, mother dear, and do you suppose anyone could be

five minutes in company with your artless daughter without knowing every secret she has in the world? Pauline! Pauline!" cries the perverse beauty, "wake up. Valentine is coming. Now you'll have a chance of studying a pair of real lovers."

Pauline wakes to consciousness with a little blush.

"I beg your pardon, Lady Rue," she says.

"What were you thinking of?" says Rue smiling. "A hero? A lovely fairy prince? Well, you are going to see one in about two hours. They tell me Valentine is quite lovely—he is not my style—I like a sort of Hercules, big, black, and bearded, and Val is fair, and only five feet ten in his boots. Don't you fall in love with him. Not that I should be jealous—I should thank anyone from my heart who would take him off my hands, but you see it's a point of honour that I should marry him. He's got the title and I have the money and lands, so," (with a sigh), "that's how it is, you see."

“Rue!” again says her mother in an imploring voice.

“My dearest, darling mother!” cries the girl springing up with a sudden bound from her recumbent position and running to Lady Valentine, “will you never give up trying to restrain your madcap’s tongue? The moment Pauline sees Val and me together, all will be out. She will think him a love and me a wretch—she will envy me and pity him, after the manner of our sex. Mother dear,” (coaxingly), “won’t you ask Sir Everard down?”

“Certainly not,” replies Lady Valentine with decision. “Rue, I am ashamed of you.” But as she looks down upon that lovely face, she has no more heart to be displeased.

“To-morrow,” says Rue dejectedly—“to-morrow the Chaloners and the Darians and Jack are coming,” (Colonel Ormond was half-brother to the late Lord Valentine). “Val will devote himself to Lady Chaloner,

and there will be no one for me. I can't flirt with Sir Philip. I might, perhaps, with Colonel Dorian, but I don't think his wife would like it. Mamma, why not Sir Everard?"

"Really, Rue, I have no patience with you," returns Lady Valentine. "Why should you want to unsettle your mind? You are engaged to your cousin, and to encourage your liking for another man, and, still worse, his for you, would be not only foolish but wrong."

"He is so angelically dark!" murmurs Rue with serio-comic plaintiveness.

"*Angelically* dark?" interposes Lady Barbara, "that's hardly appropriate, is it?"

"My dear Bab," responds her sprightly sister, "you wouldn't have me say devilishly dark, would you?"

"Rue!" again interposes her mother warningly.

"When will your nerves get seasoned, my dearest mother?" laughs mischievous

Rue. "It is very odd, though, that you are never shocked at me unless there is an audience whose feelings you think you are reflecting. After all," (rising), "I think I shall go and meet Val. I feel rather in an aggravating mood, and I can exercise it upon him."

"Is that generous?" asks her mother.

"Why, mother," and the lovely eyes that only look sleepy because of their shape and the length of their lashes, but are really full of vivacity, open wide, "you don't know so little of Val, surely, as to imagine he considers that I am doing him any favour by marrying him. He thinks to be Countess Valentine is the proudest title any woman can aspire to. Oh! I wish Papa had left him the money and the estates, and then I might have married my dark angel!" and with this, laughing merrily, and not waiting to be reproved, Rue fled out of the door, followed by her dog.

Just a word to explain the situation of

Lady Ruth and her cousin. Her father's eldest brother and his father had cut off the entail; sold part of the estates, and left what remained heavily encumbered. Her uncle dying childless, bequeathed all he had to his next brother, Lady Ruth's father. He married a city heiress with a large fortune absolutely under her own control. With this Lord Valentine repurchased all he could of the estates, added fresh land to them, and gradually restored the house of Valentine to its former dignity and honour.

After ten years marriage, his devoted but childless wife died, and he married Lady Ruth's mother. Two daughters were born to him, but, to his unutterable disappointment, no son. The re-establishment of his house had been the one object of his life, and now that he had toiled and slaved for it, dreamed of and made plans for it early and late, all must come to nothing. His daughters would take the estates to enrich

other houses—the title would belong to a landless pauper.

It was when Ruth was twelve years old and her sister eleven, and there was no prospect of any more children being born to him, that Lord Valentine began to think of permanently re-uniting the title with the estates by marrying her to the only son of a younger brother dead some years since. Valentine Ormond was a frank, high-spirited boy, four years older than Ruth, and from the moment that Lord Valentine began to think of him as a future husband for his daughter, he conceived a great affection for the boy; had him constantly at the Court, talked to him as though he had been a man about the estates and the plans he desired to have carried out, and caused him to look upon himself as heir to all the honours and dignities of the house of Valentine. Ruth was to inherit everything on attaining her twenty-first birthday, except the portion laid aside for her sister. She and Valentine

were taught to consider themselves as irre-
vocably bound to each other, and at the ages
of twelve and sixteen we may be sure that
the project stirred little reflection or desire
for opposition in the breast of either. Lady
Valentine seriously objected to this arrange-
ment. She urged that it was far better to
wait and see how their inclinations lay when
they were of an age to decide for them-
selves, and went so far even as to say that
nothing could be more calculated to set
them against each other than their compul-
sory engagement.

But Lord Valentine was obstinate. He
did not go so far as to make Ruth's inheri-
tance dependent upon her marriage with her
cousin, but during his last illness, when she
was just sixteen, he so impressed upon her
over and over again that he trusted to her
honour to carry out the conditions upon
which he left her his heiress, that in the
girl's mind the idea became fixed as the

laws of the Medes and Persians. Young Lord Valentine, for his part, considered the engagement quite irrevocable. He had imbibed from his uncle all the pride of his birth and family—the most sacred spot on earth to him was Valentine, and he looked forward with a certain degree of impatience to Lady Ruth's coming of age, when they were to marry and inherit together all that fair estate. Was he in love with her? Not a bit. He thanked heaven that she was a pretty girl, and in no way repulsive to him, but emotion of a warmer kind she was no more capable of inspiring in him than though she had been his sister. And yet Lord Valentine was a most susceptible young gentleman, and devoted to the fair, always making love to some one, but he considered himself as much protected from being asked his intentions as though he were already a married man. As for Rue, she might flirt and welcome, he said mag-

nanimously, until she became his wife, when of course he should not allow her to be talked about.

“Oh, indeed!” remarked Lady Rue with malice—“we shall see. Sauce for the goose, Val, my dear, will be sauce for the gander. I shall make a point of following your example, whatever it may be.”

And every now and then these young people would have a very pretty quarrel over what they would and would not do and allow when they were man and wife.

The train has just run into the station. Lady Ruth is awaiting her cousin in her carriage with the pretty bay cobs. The engine puffs off. Lord Valentine crosses the line and approaches her.

“How are you, Rue? What else have you got here?” His tone is quite the husband’s.

“Oh!” replies mischievous Rue, “I thought you weren’t coming for long, and that all your things would go in here.”



“And Hill, too, I suppose,” (with some irritation). “Hang it all ! what’s the good of telegraphing !”

“I believe there’s a cart somewhere,” responds Rue, and Lord Valentine jumps in beside her, not best pleased at having let her get a rise out of him so soon.

Now only to look at this handsome young couple is enough to make you die of envy to be one or other of them. Unfortunately their beauty is quite lost upon each other—their pulses are not in the faintest degree quickened by their proximity—Rue is saucy and my lord the least thing irritable. To soothe his feelings, he lights a cigarette.

“I wish you wouldn’t, Val,” says Lady Rue—“all the horrid smoke gets into my eyes and up my nose.”

“Nonsense, my dear—don’t be affected ; you must get used to it.”

“One comfort,” retorts Rue, “when we’re married, I shall never have to drive

with you—it isn't the fashion for people to go about together."

"No, thank goodness!" responds Val.

"Have you seen my dear Sir Everard lately?"

"*Your* dear Sir Everard was very much Mrs. Coventry's dear Sir Everard when I saw him at Sandown last week."

"He was trying to console himself for my loss."

"And very successfully too," replies Lord Valentine coolly.

"I don't believe it. That was the hollow mockery of woe. Was he looking lovely?"

"Very black and sallow. More like an organ-grinder than ever. He only wants a monkey to make him perfect. I always think of those delightful lines when I see him,

"'Grinder, jocund-hearted grinder,
Near whom Barbary's nimble son,
Poised with skill upon his hinder
Paws, accepts the proffered bun.'

Not that he looks very jocund—but how

can he with that bilious complexion?"

"Ah! I like a manly-looking man. I hate to see a man with a girl's pink and white skin."

This is intended for her cousin, but falls short of the mark, because, though he is fair, he is sufficiently bronzed by the July sun to be free from the slightest suspicion of effeminacy. He is, however, quite aware of the intention.

"I pity the future Lady Deloraine," he says lighting a fresh cigarette.

"And I envy her," sighs Rue.

"Not much to envy, by Jove! He has the temper of the blanked."

"I should like the temper of the blanked," says Rue demurely. "A good quarrel and have done with it. I should much prefer that to a man who was always snapping and snarling."

"You'd make anyone snap and snarl," says Lord Valentine beginning to lose his temper.

“Not if I loved him,” responds Rue with feigned enthusiasm.

My lord feels that he has come off second best, and retires into sulky silence. Then Rue, delighted at having succeeded in provoking him, becomes quite affable.

“You will have plenty to amuse you,” she says. “Lady Chaloner is coming to-morrow.”

“Oh!” responds Val and his face lights up in a manner that might have been eminently displeasing to his betrothed, had she entertained warmer feelings for him.

“And Mrs. Dorian. Do you know her?”

“I have met her. Very nice and very pretty, but quite spoony on her husband still—no good to me. By the way, you’ve got a new girl, haven’t you? A companion for Bab. What is she like?”

“She’s not to be called a companion, because she’s quite a lady, and she isn’t to be paid; it’s a sort of mutual benefit business. Her friends want her to see a little of life,

and Bab wants some one to amuse and read to her. What is she like? Well, I don't know what you'll think—rather pretty, perhaps. Her eyes always look as if they were seeing something in another world. She is very clever. I don't believe she has ever seen a young man, and will probably fall desperately in love with you. It *is* hard," (pathetically)—"there are three women for you, and not a single man for me!"

"I believe Deloraine is coming down to stay with the Lennoxes."

"Oh, Val!" and his lovely cousin turns towards him with a blush, and a very different expression from what she has hitherto regarded him. Then, (laying her hand coaxingly on his arm), "*Dearest* boy! if he does—you *will* ask him over, won't you?"

"Perhaps!" replies Lord Valentine magnanimously—his feelings not at all hurt.

Here they arrive at the lodge gates. In the distance, they see Lady Valentine and Barbara coming to meet them. Rue pulls

up and her cousin jumps out. He kisses both ladies affectionately: Barbara hangs upon his arm. She adores her handsome cousin—he is always so good and tender to her—poor little Barbara who takes such pessimist views of life. And no wonder. Here is her lovely sister with health, riches, and betrothed to the handsomest, nicest man in the world who can give her one of the proudest names in the land, (for Barbara inherits all her father's pride of birth whilst Rue is quite destitute of it), and here is she with a starving heart and a poor little frail body and no beauty. How often, how bitterly she cries over the cruel injustice of her fate! The only person except her mother who treats her with tenderness and makes much of her is Lord Valentine, and she literally worships him. She is always on his side against Rue.

An hour later, his lordship makes his appearance in the morning-room dressed for dinner. The drawing-room is not used

when the party is a small one. At first he imagines the room to be untenanted—then he sees that some one is sitting at one of the open windows overlooking the moat. It is a young girl—her head is thrown back against the oaken panel and the ruddy light of the setting sun bathes her whole face and figure. She has glorious eyes, Lord Valentine remarks to himself, and looks thoroughbred all over. He is a consistent worshipper at the shrine of the fair—his heart is capacious enough to hold a thousand pretty women—he thinks "the proper study of mankind is"—woman. He is young, high-couraged, high-spirited, and he never finds himself *tête-à-tête* with a fair one without improving the occasion.

Untroubled by the faintest suspicion of shyness, he approaches the window whose occupant is pleasing to his eye. Until he comes close to her and is also bathed in the sun's dying glory, Pauline is unconscious of his presence—then she starts and looks at

him with eyes full of trouble and embarrassment, yet withal a strange new sensation of pleasure. What Rue asserted is almost true —she has never spoken to a young, handsome, well-bred man. Her heart is brimful of romance—she has lived in a dreamland of heroes—this is the first one who has ever appeared to her in human shape. Lord Valentine with his handsome face, his hazel eyes that speak volumes when he looks at a woman who pleases him, is quite calculated to trouble the breast of a dreamy imaginative girl like Pauline.

“Miss Lemercier?” he says and takes her hand in a friendly self-possessed way, “we must introduce ourselves as there is no one here to perform the ceremony.”

And with that he seats himself in the window near her and talks about the place and his cousins as though he had known her all his life. Poor Pauline!

Lady Rue comes in and after an arch look at the couple, passes on to the adjoining room.

Pauline starts up half guiltily. "There is Lady Rue," she says.

A smile comes into Lord Valentine's expressive eyes.

"Rue and I have said all we have to say to each other," he says. "I don't think we could possibly find another idea between us."

Then Lady Barbara appears and comes straight to the window with a little frown puckering her brow. She is dreadfully jealous of her cousin and cannot bear to see him smiling at another woman.

He rises and puts an arm round her so sweetly and kindly that she is mollified at once, and looks up in his face with a happy expression that makes Pauline wonder secretly. She feels herself *de trop*, and turns away to the window.

"Miss Lemercier and I had to introduce ourselves," says Lord Valentine. "I see you are still slaves to unpunctuality, all of you."

"You will keep us in order when you are master here, won't you?" says Barbara stroking his arm lovingly.

"When I am," he answers laughing—"if Rue does not throw me over for Deloraine, with whom she seems madly in love at present."

But it is evident that he is only speaking in jest, and has no thought of the possibility of there being any truth in his words.

"What a naughty girl Rue is!" says Lady Valentine, who enters at this moment. "Has she been teasing you, Val?"

"Trying to. My dear aunt, I suppose all your clocks are out of order. Do you know that it is nearly twenty minutes past eight?"

"Is it really? Ring the bell, dear." And Lord Valentine proceeds to do so authoritatively.

"Dinner is served, my lady," announces the butler simultaneously.

Mischievous Lady Rue insists upon placing

Pauline in the seat next her cousin, (Barbara never resigns her place on his left to anyone), and sits next her mother.

“I don’t want to have Val talking across me to Pauline all dinner-time,” she explains, and poor Pauline blushes and feels very uncomfortable.

Lady Valentine only smiles—she is so used to Rue—but Barbara frowns. She does not want her cousin to talk to Pauline, and engrosses his attention as much as possible. But Lord Valentine can say a great deal with his eyes, and every now and then he speaks to Pauline with them and his lips too, and she gradually feels her heart being absorbed in the fire of those glances, and even ere dinner is over, she no longer belongs to herself. Mischievous Rue, not reflecting that it may be no laughing matter for one, at least, of the pair, is highly diverted—she is always delighted to have a new proof of Val’s fickleness and inconstancy.

“Let us go out,” says the young man, as Lady Valentine rises—“there is a moon, and we will go on the water, and you shall sing, Rue. We can fancy ourselves in Venice.”

“I never sing since I have heard Pauline,” returns Lady Rue. “And you will never ask me again once you have had that pleasure.”

“Oh, Miss Lemercier, do you sing?” asks Lord Valentine eagerly. “It is the most charming thing a woman can do.”

“It is past ten, and the drawbridges will be up,” says Lady Barbara, who does not want them to go out, as she cannot join them.

“Then, my dear little Bab, we will have them down again. You go and sit at the window and we will serenade you. Rue, ring and see about it whilst I change my coat.”

It is done as he orders—women like to have a man to lay down the law to them

particularly when they are not used to it. Pauline demurs to accompany the cousins.

“Nonsense, my dear,” says Rue—“it is you he wants, not me—only, of course, I must do *chaperon* for propriety’s sake.” So Pauline goes.

Lord Valentine jumps into the boat, and makes Rue sit at one end and Pauline at the other, giving the post of honour, facing himself, to Pauline. It is a heavenly night—soft, warm, windless; the moon is so bright you can see the colours of the flowers in the garden—it turns the latticed panes of the windows to silver and diamonds, and throws out the grand old red many-gabled house into clear relief.

Lord Valentine makes two or three strokes with the sculls, then he looks at Pauline and entreats her for a song. She is shy at first—her voice trembles, but soon she masters that and sings song after song. Her voice is delicious, so sweet and rich and rarely pathetic. She does not know the

modern fashionable ballads, but has a great store of songs—Neapolitan and Roman songs of the people—quaint old English and Scotch songs, and Moore's Irish melodies. The effect of her voice on the water in the still night is entrancing—various windows in the house open stealthily, though no faces appear at them. Lord Valentine is enchanted. He fixes his eyes on Pauline, and hardly takes them off her at all. His back is turned to Rue—she cannot see him—if she did, she would not mind. She is dipping her dainty fingers in the water and thinking of Sir Everard.

Pauline has just sung “Santa Lucia.” Lady Valentine's stately figure appears at one of the open windows.

“My dear children, I am sorry to interrupt you; it is very charming, and I have thoroughly enjoyed it, but it is long past eleven, and you must really come in.”

“How cruel of you to remind us of time, Auntie!” cries Lord Valentine's gay young

voice ; however, he proceeds to land his fair freight, only just giving his hand slightly to Rue, but helping Pauline with the utmost care, and holding her hand firmly and with a lingering pressure. And thus she for the first time learns what the rapture is of which she has so often dreamed.

CHAPTER III.

A BRIEF ROMANCE.

POOR Pauline! No sleep visited her eyes that night. She lay in a kind of trance, going through over and over again in her mind the incidents of the last few hours. Full of passionate romance, utterly ignorant of life, unversed in the ways of men, she wove in her brain wonderful fancies of which she was the heroine and Lord Valentine the hero. In her books, love had always come at first sight—the knight had looked in the lady's eyes and she in his, and their hearts had gone out at once to each other. She called up in her vivid brain the long glances of Lord Valen-

tine's handsome eyes; her hand still felt the fervent pressure of his—yes, already he loved her, and the only wonderful part of it to Pauline was what this fairy prince could have seen to care for in so lowly a damsel as herself. The heroines of her romances were always beautiful, (it was not the fashion in those days to make heroines of snub-nosed, red-haired young women), and Pauline had a very humble opinion of her own charms. Still the delightful fact remained. He was engaged to his cousin—there were always obstacles, and Pauline was far too romantic to think of marriage as the end of the goal—they were to love each other, that was all, and dangers, difficulties, and disappointments were the food on which heroes and heroines kept their love alive. A delightful thought came to Pauline; she would paint his picture stealthily and in secret, then she would always have it to look at and to wear next her heart. For Pauline was accomplished as well as clever,

and could do most things. And how, though living in one of the wildest, loneliest parts of England, utterly without society, she came to be so was in this wise :

Her father, descended from a Huguenot family who had taken refuge in England, was, when a young man, tutor to the only son of a baronet. His pupil had two sisters —it was an old, old story. One of these girls fell in love with the handsome tutor, married him, and was cut off for ever from her home and friends. Poverty broke her love and her heart, and she died at Pauline's birth. Mr. Lemercier was given a small living by an old college friend of his father's, and there he remained to the present day, never striving to improve his position. Pauline was an encumbrance ; he cared little for her, and left her almost entirely to the care of his one servant, who fortunately entertained a great love and pity for the poor little motherless child. Pauline might have grown up an ignorant young savage, but that their only

neighbour, the patron of the living, saw and conceived a great fancy for the child. He was an exceedingly clever and accomplished man, but a confirmed invalid. With Mr. Lemercier's permission, gladly enough accorded, he proceeded to undertake Pauline's education. Never was there a more willing pupil or a brighter intelligence. Mr. Russell had no cause to regret his undertaking; it was a source of the greatest delight to him, and amply repaid his trouble. He taught her French, German, Italian, the rudiments of Latin—taught her to play, to sing, to paint, to read aloud, and her accomplishments became the source of his greatest pleasures, as he enjoyed nothing so much as to hear her sing or read aloud, which she did with rare expression.

So Pauline could do almost everything but use her needle, and that implement she cordially detested.

Mr. Russell had an immense library, and Pauline read with avidity. Her master

gave her free access to his books without restriction ; he had an idea that to the pure all things are pure—that a young girl was not in the least likely to get harm from impurities which she did not understand, and that, as many of the finest specimens of literature are mixed up with a great deal of objectionable matter, the reader must take his or her chance. He locked up a couple of volumes of Balzac, some of Swift's works, "Tristram Shandy," and various other books that he considered indecent and disgusting, and let her have the run of the rest. Mr. Russell was quite right. Pauline, being perfectly innocent, or rather ignorant, which is the truest innocence, was in no wise harmed by her very mixed reading, excepting perhaps that she got her brain filled with an extraordinary jumble of romance, likely enough to prove very unserviceable to her when she came to the practical part of her life. Mr. Russell had two sisters who occasionally visited him.

About two months previous to Pauline's meeting with Lord Valentine, one of these sisters—a woman who went a good deal into society, had paid a visit to Mr. Russell. She had been charmed with Pauline, and told her brother frankly that she thought it a cruelty to keep the girl shut up in the wilds without a chance of mixing with young people of her own age.

Then she remembered that Lady Valentine had consulted her only a week previously about getting some one to be with Lady Barbara, who was too delicate to go into society, and was left very much alone in consequence. It is unnecessary to enter into details, but finally it was arranged that Pauline should spend six months in Lady Valentine's family as a guest, with perfect liberty to leave at any time if the life did not suit her or she grew home-sick. Mrs. Russell undertook to superintend Pauline's wardrobe, and six weeks later she became an inmate of Valentine Court.

At first it seemed rather like being transplanted into the realms of enchantment, but Pauline very soon took to her new life. The fact of having been constantly with a man of so much refinement as Mr. Russell prevented her from feeling any *gaucherie* amongst these well-bred people. She had a tender heart and was extremely sympathetic so that Barbara's ailing health filled her with the greatest compassion and she was delighted to do all in her power to distract the poor girl from her sad thoughts by singing and reading to her, and what Barbara liked best, telling her quaint old stories from memory. And Barbara had been delighted with her—until Lord Valentine arrived. He was the only man who ever treated her in a tender, caressing manner and she adored him and was passionately jealous of him. It was grief and pain to her to see him bestow attention on another woman, but that he and Rue would one day make up another she felt was a

certainty, but it consoled her to think that they did not care for each other. She knew he could never be more than cousin and brother to her, it was impossible he should ever be her lover ; she did not even think of him in such a way, feeling, poor forlorn little maid ! that love was not for her, but she could not help resenting his liking for others. So on that night when he took Pauline and Rue in the boat, she went away to bed and cried bitterly.

It was not her habit to appear at breakfast except when her cousin was with them, then she invariably came down. And Lord Valentine always put his arm round her and kissed her, which he never did to Rue. He was kinder than ever to her the morning after his arrival, and Barbara, who had been very unhappy and cross, brightened up and a smile came into her poor little pale cheeks.

Pauline, desperately shy and conscious after her wakeful night, went and sat near

Lady Valentine and scarcely raised her eyes from her plate.

“Will you take me out this morning Val?” Lady Barbara asked her cousin, and he at once assented.

“What shall we go in, Bab?”

“Oh, the dog-cart, I suppose.”

“No, that will hurt your poor little back,” he decided. “We will have Rue’s phaeton.”

“Will you!” says Rue.

“I should think you might let me have it for once,” cries her sister pettishly.

“Well!” replies Rue pursing up her mouth. “I will lend it to Val on one condition. Not that I like his driving my cobs, he is so reckless.”

“I am sure he is not,” retorts Barbara, “I would go anywhere with him.”

“That’s a good little Bab,” says Lord Valentine. “And I’d rather go out with you a thousand times than with Rue—you never fidget and worry.”

"You are so quarrelsome," says Rue loftily. "It is impossible to get on with you."

"Val and I never quarrel," cries Barbara, "do we, Val?"

"Never, little Bab. I wish Rue was half as amiable as you."

"Do you!" retorts Rue.

"But about this condition," says Lord Valentine, "what is it?"

"Oh, I cannot tell you now."

"Well, you had better look sharp and make up your mind, for I am going round to the stables to order the cobs. We will start before it gets too hot. Will you be ready in half-an-hour, Bab?"

"Oh, yes," she returns joyfully.

Lord Valentine takes out a cigarette and goes into the hall to light it. Lady Rue follows him.

"Well, what is it?" he asks striking a match.

Rue looks a little bit shy as she puts one

hand on his arm, and ever such a little blush comes into her cheek.

One might imagine that a young man of Lord Valentine's proclivities, seeing such a delicious face and such provoking red lips within a few inches of his own, would have been tempted to take advantage of this golden opportunity, especially when he had a perfect right to. Perhaps the right interfered with the inclination, for the idea never even occurred to him, and he proceeded calmly to light his cigarette.

“Will you ride over to the Lennoxes with me this afternoon?” she asks him in a beseeching voice.

“Oh!” he says, “you want to hear when your *dear Sir Everard* is coming, do you? Don’t you think it’s rather barefaced to run after him in that way?”

Lady Rue colours hotly and removes her hand from his arm.

“You are a bear,” she says petulantly.

“You might give the Lennox girls

a chance. They want him for Cath."

"Cath is very welcome to him. I can't have him. Am I not engaged to you?"

"Well, then, what do you want with him?"

"What do you want with other women?" retorts Rue. "Very well, then I shan't let you flirt with Pauline or Lady Chaloner."

"Won't you?" says Lord Valentine his hazel eyes beginning to flash. "How will you help it?"

"Ah! you'll see," she returns provokingly.

Her cousin looks at her for a moment as though he thought her quite capable of anything; then he says,

"Of course I don't care two straws what you do. You may go and live at the Lennoxes if you like."

"Well, then, you will order the horses at four."

"If you like. Better say half-past."

"All right." And having gained her

point, Lady Rue returns singing to the dining-room.

“Come into the garden, Pauline!” she says.

But Pauline excuses herself on the ground that she wants to write letters. Naughty little Pauline! it is something quite different she has in her head. She is longing to begin Prince Charming’s portrait. But as, like most of her sex, her ideas about “the letter and the spirit” of an untruth are peculiar, she, when she has locked herself in her room, sits down and writes three lines of an epistle to Mr. Russell, and then, eagerly taking out her drawing materials, sets to work on her delightful task. The hours fly, the luncheon-gong sounds, and finds her still pencil in hand. She has considerable skill in portrait painting—has taken an admirable likeness of Mr. Russell, one of her faithful old servant at home, besides one of her father from memory, as he would not sit to her.

“What have you been doing all the morning?” Lady Rue asks her. “You can’t have been writing letters. I believe you are writing a three-volume novel.”

Pauline blushes vividly. Lord Valentine, who always imagines that a woman’s blush must in some way be connected with one of his sex, directly or indirectly, says to himself,

“I’ll lay five to two she’s been writing to some fellow.”

Pauline, looking up, meets his eyes, and sees the smile in them. It startles her —to her sensitive imagination it seems as though he knew or guessed what she had been doing.

“Come!” says Lady Valentine hastening to her rescue, “I shall not allow Pauline to be cross-examined. Her time is her own.” And she smiles kindly at the girl.

“Miss Lemercier, won’t you sing us something!” Lord Valentine asks her after lunch in his most caressing tones.

Pauline is about to acquiesce when Barbara says a little querulously,

“I want Pauline to read to me.”

“Barbara, my love,” interposes her mother, “you must not be exacting—I don’t think that reading aloud can be a very agreeable occupation for a warm afternoon.”

“I will gladly read to Lady Barbara,” Pauline hastens to say.

“Come, little Bab!” says Lord Valentine, putting his arm round her, “join your entreaties to mine and ask Miss Lemercier to sing, and you and I will sit on the sofa together and listen.” And Barbara, who can never refuse him anything when he asks her in his caressing manner, does as he bids her.

Pauline is happy. She loves to sing, and now for the first time in her life that she is filled with the delicious emotion of wishing to please not for duty but for love’s sake, her thrilling voice takes new pathos—an inspiration comes to her that surprises and

enchants even herself—she is conscious of the newly-acquired beauty of her singing.

Poor little Barbara with her head on her cousin's shoulder feels her heart broken by this pathos—all the griefs and woes of her lot surge up in her brain and send the hot tears to her eyes. She is cut off from the pleasures, the hopes, the joys of her sex—the love that she craves the more ardently because it is denied her. She feels herself physically a pariah—no man will ever hang upon her smiles—the kindest feeling she is capable of inspiring is only pity. Poor little Bab who has aspirations and yearnings undreamed of yet by her lovely, frivolous sister.

Lord Valentine listens with closed eyes to Pauline's marvellous voice. To him it is mere sensuous enjoyment—the blood runs so blithely through his strong young veins—he has no regrets, no griefs—only a keen sense of pleasure.

Rue lies in the window and toys with her



dog's ears and looks across at the sunshine lying on the flower-beds and is animated by a shallow sense of *bien être* which presently sends her fast asleep.

Lady Valentine has her back turned to the rest, her face is concealed by her hand but tears are trickling through her jewelled fingers. She is thinking of her lost youth and the dead man whom she loved and of her loneliness and the disappointments of life.

When at last Pauline rises, she goes to her and kissing her very kindly thanks her.

“You are beyond compliments, my dear,” she says.

Lord Valentine jumps up and goes towards her paying her a thousand flatteries both with lips and eyes.

“I would rather hear you than Patti, Nillson, and Albani rolled into one,” he says with extreme enthusiasm. “By Jove!” in a tone of disgust as he catches sight of Rue sleeping sweetly, “Rue has not an atom of soul.”



“How lovely she looks!” says Pauline who is an ardent admirer of beauty. “Would she not make a charming picture of the sleeping beauty?”

“Why don’t you wake her like the prince did, Val?” asks Lady Barbara.

“I would rather shake her,” he says, and suiting the action to the word he goes towards her and takes her by the arm.

The long lashes unclose and discover a startled pair of blue eyes, the red mouth opens—for a moment Rue’s senses are still asleep. Then, as she sees Lord Valentine standing over her, she turns from him pettishly.

“Leave me alone. I was in such a delightful sleep and you have woke me. I hate you.”

“You have been losing the most delicious singing that ever was heard,” he cries indignantly.

“Leave me alone,” she retorts sleepily.
“Go and talk to Pauline.”



So he turns and leaves her.

Later, however, as they are starting on their riding expedition, Rue has recovered her good temper, and is making herself unusually agreeable to her future lord.

An unexpected treat is in store for her. Not only does she have news of Sir Everard, but actually beholds him in the flesh. He has already arrived on his visit to the Lennoxes. Miss Catherine, who is sitting in the garden with him, is not particularly charmed at Lady Rue's presence, the object of which she conjectures. She thinks, not unnaturally, that her friend might be satisfied with her own fish, and not be poaching in other people's waters. Still less delighted is she when Sir Everard's dark eyes kindle with pleasure as Lady Rue proposes to them to go over to the Court next day and play lawn-tennis. Lord Valentine seconds the invitation, and his cousin resolves to reward him for his good behaviour.

“What a lovely couple they make!” says

the eldest Miss Lennox to Sir Everard as Rue and Lord Valentine ride away.

“Lady Rue is very lovely,” he answers pointedly. That, of course, is mere jealousy, for Val looks to perfection on horseback.

“Val,” says Lady Rue when they are out of sight, “you are a darling.” And she extends a friendly little hand to him, which he barely condescends to touch.

“Cath will hate you for life,” he says. “And what good is it to you, pray, to have the fellow dangling after you? Look here, Rue,” (turning in his saddle and fixing his eyes very decidedly upon her face), “I am not going to have you carry it too far, and get talked about. And if I thought,” (with considerable energy), “that you would ever let him kiss you——”

“Well,” says Rue half laughing, half blushing, “what would you do?”

“I should call him out and shoot him,” replies Lord Valentine coolly. “Because

you are my property just as much as if I were married to you."

"Not quite as much," retorts Rue. Then, after a pause—"Val, do you never kiss a woman?"

It is his lordship's turn to colour. He laughs a short, uneasy laugh.

"Of course not," he answers.

"I am glad of that," answers Rue demurely, and though he turns and looks sharply at her, the young man does not quite understand the expression of her face.

When they reach the Court, the guests have all arrived. Lady Chaloner is looking lovelier than ever. She greets Lord Valentine with her sweetest smile, and it is easy to read in his ingenuous face the pleasure he experiences at seeing her. From the moment she enters the house, he is her devoted slave—neither Rue nor Pauline exist for him; the only person he does not neglect for her ladyship's sweet sake is Barbara.

Pauline's dream has turned to a nightmare. Two and twenty blissful hours, in which life has been invested with a newer, more entrancing interest; in which her heart has expanded like a rose in sunshine; in which a veil has been drawn from her eyes, and she has crossed the threshold of love's temple and seen the mysteries and delights thereof. And now she is thrust back from the door by a rude hand, but her veil is not restored to her—she must evermore see the delight of those who go to and fro therein, yet be outcast herself. The fabric her romantic brain had built up until in this little time it towered to heaven, has fallen at her feet like a house of cards. She wonders to herself if she is the same Pauline as yesterday. No, the Pauline of yesterday had never known suffering—to-day she is conscious of the most agonising tortures.

Poor little girl! she had fancied that what she had read in Lord Valentine's eyes was love—she had woven a romance out of his

glances and hand-pressures—all their lives long, whatever befel, they would love each other. And to-night he is looking at Lady Chaloner with the same glances—nay, they are intensified—he is whispering to her—is utterly engrossed with her—seems to have no thought or recollection of anyone else. Once Pauline meets his gaze—he smiles vaguely at her—there is no look of remembrance or interest in his eyes. She is like one stunned. Lady Chaloner is very beautiful—it is no wonder that a man should love her, but—but she has a husband. Pauline is quite new to the world. She looks furtively at Sir Philip, on whose right hand she sits—he evidently sees nothing to displease him. Then she glances at Rue with a vague hope that she, too, will be jealous; but Rue is talking merrily away to Colonel Dorian. Suddenly she catches Colonel Ormond's gaze fixed intently upon her, and, crimsoning, she bends over her plate, and

has scarcely courage to raise her eyes again during dinner. Jack is wondering to himself what gives yonder pale-faced little girl so wild and agonized a look. Is it possible that they are unkind to her? he says to himself, but dismisses the idea at once, knowing Lady Valentine too well to doubt her.

After dinner Pauline steals away to her own room. She longs to throw herself beside her bed, and cry away the weight of tears that lies upon her heart, but she dares not—not yet. Lady Valentine may send for her. So she stands at her window and looks out on the fair night. Just such a night as yesterday—the same bright moon shining upon the water and the quaint flower-garden—the same warmth and hush and softness—the only difference lies in the girl's heart. Alas! the world-old story! Joy and delight yesterday—sorrow and anguish to-day. And yesterday was so short—to-day is so long.

If Lady Chaloner had but come yesterday, or Lord Valentine to-day, Pauline would have been heart-whole now. Upon such trifles, such mere chances, hangs our fate. He would have occupied himself with her lovely ladyship—would have had no eyes, no thought for Pauline, and she would have had no foundation upon which to build that fair and lovely castle in Spain which lies in ruins to-night.

A long, long time she stands there, until there is borne upon her ear theplash of oars, and the sound of a gay voice: a voice that thrills her very soul now; that seven and twenty hours ago was as the voice of any other stranger. Trembling, Pauline hides herself behind the curtains, and looks down. There are only two people in the boat to-night—Lady Chaloner, with a lace mantilla thrown round her, and Lord Valentine, bare-headed, leaning towards his lovely companion. Now they are passing under



her window—his words come floating up to her.

“Did you notice that pale little girl at dinner? She has a divine voice. I wish she would come and sing to us. I would lie at your feet and fancy myself in Paradise!”

“Is a third person necessary to your conception of Paradise?” answers Lady Chaloner in her *trainante* voice.

“Do you think it is?” he says in a low voice bending towards her.

A stifled sob breaks from Pauline as she turns from the window. She can no longer control herself—her heart has overflowed—she is in an agony of tears.

Meantime Colonel Ormond, who cannot get that wild, suffering face out of his kind heart, has taken an opportunity to draw his sister-in-law aside.

“Ruth,” he asks, “what ails that poor little girl you have here? Has she lost a

relation, or had a disappointment, or what?"

Lady Valentine looks mystified. She has been too much engrossed with her cares as hostess even to think of Pauline.

"Oh no," she answers; "she is always pale and has a dreamy, far-off look. She is very clever."

"She had no dreamy, far-off look to-night," says Jack with decision; "she looked as if she were on the rack."

"Perhaps she has a headache," suggests Lady Valentine. "I do not see her," (glancing round); "I will send Rue to look for her—no, I will go myself." And she rises and takes her way upstairs, and Colonel Orinond, whose interest is strangely roused, waits in the hall for her return. She is absent some ten minutes, and then comes back with a troubled face.

"Well?" asks Jack eagerly.

"I cannot make it out," she says. "I

listened at the door a moment and fancied I heard sobs, then I turned the handle softly and found the poor child sitting on the floor by her bed crying as if her heart would break."

"Poor little soul!" murmurs Jack. "I thought so."

"I entreated her to tell me what was the matter, but I could get nothing out of her. She only shook her head and gasped 'Nothing, nothing.' I am afraid she must be home-sick."

"It must be something more than that," remarks Colonel Ormond.

"She seemed in excellent spirits all day," says Lady Valentine musingly; "she was singing exquisitely to us this afternoon. Bab, darling," to her daughter who has just joined them and is leaning on her arm, "have you any idea what ails poor Pauline? She is crying her heart out upstairs."

"No, mamma," answers Barbara. But

that is not true. In her heart she well conjectures the cause of Pauline's woe. She is sorry for her now; when Lord Valentine had made much of her, she had almost hated her.

"I am very grieved about it," says Lady Valentine. "However, it may only be that her nerves are over-strung. I think the kindest thing we can do is to leave her alone for the present."

Then to change the subject as they return to the drawing-room, she says,

"What a charming person Mrs. Dorian is?"

And Jack answers,

"Yes; if the word had been coined for her, it could not more perfectly express her."

There is something in his tone that makes Barbara, who is gifted with subtle intuitions, turn and look up in his face.

"What are you thinking, little Bab?" he

asks, in his turn surprised by her look, and she gives him the mendacious answer that we so frequently give when we are thinking or feeling or suffering most.

“Nothing.”

CHAPTER IV.

A WILFUL PAIR.

TO Rhona, a decade seems to divide her from this time last year. Twelve months ago, she and Rue would have been perfect companions—two merry, light-hearted girls together; there is but a year's difference in their ages. But now her love, her sufferings, her experiences seem to make a gulf between her and girlhood—she looks down from the pedestal of matronhood, sympathetic, but far off. She spends her time mostly in the society of Lady Valentine, with whom she feels the most at home; even Lady Chaloner, engaged in her flirtation with Lord Valentine, seems

younger than she. Since Rue does not mind, no one appears to feel it incumbent on him or her to take exception to the proceedings of the pair ; Sir Philip, least of all.

Rhona has a bright, gay manner with men that makes them find her charming, but it is utterly devoid of coquetry—no one could discover in it anything but pure friendliness—how can a woman who loves one man sincerely and entirely feel aught for another ! It is that simple graciousness, that entire absence of desire to engross the attention of men that makes Jack Ormond admire her so heartily and sincerely. He thinks George Dorian the very most fortunate man in the world and it chafes him, for Rhona's sake, to see how unresponsive is his manner to her and how little appreciation seems to dwell in his eyes when they rest on her. Jack is always wanting to devote himself to her to prevent her feeling neglected, and is a little irritated by the secret consciousness that no one can make

up to her for her husband's indifference. But Colonel Dorian is not really indifferent—he is fond of Rhona and proud of her, but he hates any demonstration of regard between man and wife in public and prefers to let her feel slighted to the chance of incurring the ridicule of being an uxorious husband. Ah ! he little dreams how he is endangering the substance for the shadow ! Rhona says nothing now—when her lord flings her scraps of affection and tenderness, she receives them thankfully—when he forbears to notice her, she only thinks with a swelling heart how changed things are since last year and wonders if the romance of all women's lives is of so short a span. When she is in the presence of lovers—when she sees the passionate tenderness in the man's eyes ; notes the softness in his expression, the homage of his lips ; her sensitive mouth quivers, her eyes grow dim and she longs to say to the girl, “ Ah ! make the most of your happy-

ness—it will not last!" Often Rhona goes into Barbara's sitting-room where the poor little invalid mostly sits with Pauline now—the two girls by a common instinct seem to shrink away from the rest of the party and to take refuge in each other. Neither ever seeks to know the other's thoughts but there is a mute companionship of suffering between them. They like Rhona and are always glad when she comes to them—there is something so sympathetic about her—she does not jar upon them as Lady Chaloner and Rue in their beauty, good fortune and high spirits do. Rhona can place a cushion, a stool, or perform some kindly little service for Barbara as only a woman with a ready sympathy can—did you ever notice the difference in the attentions to an invalid between a sympathetic and an unsympathetic person? The intention may be as kindly in one as in the other, but oh! the difference in the carrying out of it!

Rhona is interested in both the girls, but more especially in Pauline. Even if Jack had not confided in her, she would have seen that there was some burden lying on the girl's heart. And one day, she discovered what it was. She was sitting in Barbara's sanctum. Pauline was singing to them. As she finished a song, a knock came at the door and Lord Valentine, without waiting to be bidden, entered.

"Miss Lemercier," he said approaching Pauline, "*do* come into the drawing-room and sing to us. It is too tantalising to listen to you through closed doors, and Lady Chaloner is dying to hear you."

Rhona, who is watching Pauline, sees a red wave of colour pass over her face—sees a pained, revolted look come into her eyes—sees her turn mutely to Barbara as if for help. In a second she divines the girl's secret.

Barbara rushes to the rescue.

"No!" she says sharply—much more sharply than is her wont when speaking to

her handsome cousin—"I cannot spare Pauline."

"Then let us come in here, mayn't we, Bab?" entreats the young man eagerly.

"No," she answers, "we don't want Lady Chaloner here. And she has no soul for music. She would much rather, I am sure, hear your voice telling her for the ten thousandth time how lovely she is, than Pauline's singing, or anyone else's."

Barbara speaks in a tone that quivers with resentment.

For a moment an angry look comes into Lord Valentine's eyes. It is only for a moment—he is too chivalrous to show any harshness to his poor little suffering cousin. He goes up to her quite kindly.

"Then, little Bab, may I stop here alone and hear one song?"

But Pauline has risen, and is standing looking out of the window.

"I do not think Pauline wants to sing any more," says Lady Barbara.

Lord Valentine turns appealingly to Rhona.

“Mrs. Dorian, won’t you intercede for me? What have I done to these young ladies that they will have nothing to say to me?”

Rhona answers him gaily, and tries for a moment to direct his attention from the others, that they may have time to recover themselves. Then she says, turning to Pauline,

“Are you too tired to sing to us once more?”

Pauline returns to the piano and sings a short song—sings it stiffly, mechanically—without pathos or sentiment. Poor little soul! it is her only alternative from breaking into tears. But Lord Valentine thinks her ill-natured, and when she has finished, rises and says with cold ceremony,

“Thank you. I am sorry to have troubled you,” and goes from the room with a displeased air.

Pauline sits for a moment with quivering lips, and a wild, piteous look in her eyes; then she rises hurriedly, and goes away out of another door.

After a moment's silence, Barbara breaks out irritably—

“Is not Lady Chaloner a horrid woman? Don’t you think it shameful of Valentine to flirt so with her? If I were Rue, I would not stand it.”

“Your sister does not seem to mind,” answers Rhona evasively. “But perhaps she feels so sure of him in her heart that she does not mind his paying a little attention elsewhere now and then.”

“She does not care, Mrs. Dorian,” and Barbara fixes her eyes wistfully on Rhona. “This is a very unhappy, unsatisfactory world—is it not? Even with those people to whom God seems to have given every-thing,” (and the poor little voice breaks into a half-sob), “things don’t seem to go smoothly always—they take a wicked delight, I

think, in pulling down their happiness with their own hands, and throwing their chances away. But it would not be fair," (eagerly), "if they were all happy and fortunate, whilst we——"

Then poor Barbara breaks down altogether, and falls to bitter weeping. Rhona goes softly to her, and takes the tired head against her tender breast, and strokes with gentle hand the silky hair, and weeps a little, too, for sympathy. For, indeed, her own heart is heavy, and tears are never far from her eyelids now. It is not often that Barbara gives way before a stranger—she is naturally shy and reserved. But it is good to have sympathy, and her burst of crying soothes her. After that day she takes a great fancy to Rhona, and likes to be often with her.

One afternoon, all the ladies of the party are assembled together at afternoon tea—for the moment there is no man present.

Lady Chaloner is writing a letter at a side table.

“Rue,” she says looking up, (they are the best of friends), “I want some sealing-wax—where can I find it?”

“There is none here,” answers Lady Rue, tea-pot in hand. “Pauline, dear, would you mind fetching a piece out of Bab’s room? I saw some there this morning.”

Pauline fetches it and puts it down beside Lady Chaloner.

“Tha-anks,” she drawls without looking up. She does not like Pauline.

“You are writing secrets,” laughs Rue archly. “Sealing-wax looks very suspicious.”

“I have taken to using it for the last six months,” replies Lady Chaloner: “ever since I stayed with Mrs. Temple. There the second post always came in just at tea-time, and if there was any letter for her son in a woman’s hand, she used to put it over a

cup of hot water and then open it with a paper-knife."

"How dishonourable!" cries Rhona with flashing eyes. "Why did you not tell him?"

"Oh, I never spoil sport, and it used to be great fun sometimes. I know one or two women who would have gone out of their minds if they had thought their letters would have been seen by her and me."

"But did he not find her out?" asks Rue.

"No—she always shut them up neatly again with a little gum. He told me once that he thought his mother must be in league with the devil from the extraordinary knowledge she seemed to possess of his affairs."

"I would have told him," says Rue.

"She would never have forgiven me, and it amused me immensely to hear the letters. She used to laugh over them till the tears ran down her cheeks."

“What a horrid old woman!” remarks Rue. “Was she not afraid of the servants finding her out?”

“No—she used to put the quilted tea-pot cover over the cup and letter.”

“But were there no other women there?” asks Rhona, whose speaking face very candidly reveals her opinion, not only of the principal actor in this little drama, but of the person who was accessory to the fact.

“Only one, and Mrs. Temple knew we were both to be relied upon. So, since then, I have always made a point of sealing my letters. But,” (looking up and smiling), “I know a way of opening sealed letters too without touching the seal.”

“Do you?” cries Rue inquisitively—“oh, how?”

“My dear,” interposes Lady Valentine with gentle dignity, “I do not think the knowledge would be of any use to you. I am quite sure no child of mine would be guilty of so dishonourable an action as to

open a letter not intended for her eyes."

"It might be useful, you know, Mamma dear," says Rue, her eyes dancing with mischief. "Then I might be able, when we are married, to find Val out if he were corresponding with anyone whom I disapproved of."

"You would discover, my dear," replies her mother half smiling, half in earnest, "that there is nothing so unpleasant as finding people out, especially when you have done it in a manner that you are ashamed to confess."

At this moment Lord Valentine enters.

"Val!" cries incorrigible Rue, "Lady Chaloner has just been giving us a lesson in——"

But Lady Chaloner, dropping her accustomed languor, has risen to her feet and says in rather an angry tone,

"Rue, I must beg that you will not say anything to Lord Valentine about what I told you in fun."

Lord Valentine looks inquisitively from one to the other.

“ You’ll tell me afterwards, won’t you ? ” he says in a caressing tone to Lady Chaloner.

At this, Barbara, with a look of disgust, goes out of the room and Pauline follows her. Pauline has listened to Lady Chaloner’s story with contemptuous wonder—little does she dream that that lady has put into her hand a weapon to use against herself one day.

“ What would Lord Valentine have thought of her, ” she asks Barbara, “ if Lady Rue had told him ? Would he still have liked her ? ”

“ Of course he would, ” retorts the girl bitterly. “ When Val is in love with a woman, he thinks everything she does perfection as long as she does not hurt his own vanity.”

Lord Valentine has behaved with great magnanimity to Rue in that he has invited

Sir Everard to come over to the Court to stay from Friday till Monday. Perhaps he thinks it only fair that she should have a little amusement—perhaps he wishes to be perfectly free to give his undivided attention to Lady Chaloner. Lady Valentine, when she hears what he has done, does not feel pleased or easy in her mind. She is far from being a censorious woman—indeed she is more unsuspicious than is compatible with worldly wisdom. Her nephew's flirtation with Lady Chaloner gives her no uneasiness since the two people most concerned in the matter, Sir Philip and Rue, seem so little troubled about it. She would have been the first to resent a slight to her daughter if the girl herself had suffered from it. The cousins were not to be married for nearly two years and Lady Valentine thought it hardly desirable that they should go on love-making so long in advance. No doubt they would be quite as happy and pleased with each other when the time

actually came if there were not quite such a strain on their feelings before-hand. But what might be all very well and natural for a man was not the same for a woman. It would be a very serious matter if Rue's affections became centred upon another man —she foresaw grave complications and even serious unhappiness for both her nephew and her daughter should such a case arise. There was no doubt that Sir Everard Deloraine's feeling for Rue was something more than admiration, and Lady Valentine had a shrewd suspicion that only a very light breeze was wanting to fan the girl's liking for him into love. When the party is separating for the night, she whispers to her nephew,

“I want to speak to you. Can you spare me five minutes in my boudoir?” and he acquiesces at once. He only delays a moment to give Lady Chaloner her candle; to take one more long inspiration from her dark eyes and to press her fingers. Then having

remembered that he is going in the same direction, he accompanies her up the stairs insisting on carrying her candle, and so absorbed is he in contemplation of her loveliness that he holds it all awry showering drops of grease liberally on the carpet as he goes.

“I want to talk seriously to you, Val,” says his aunt when he appears in her room and has closed the door behind him.

“You are not going to scold me?” he says coming up to her and kissing her cheek.

Certainly Lord Valentine is a very fascinating young man and it would be impossible for any woman to be angry with him when he puts on that caressing manner of his.

“It is not about Lady Chaloner,” says the Countess, smiling, “though I really think, my dear boy, that you are carrying matters rather far. But I am vexed that you have asked Sir Everard here.

What can have induced you to do so?"

"I did it to please Rue," he answers simply.

"And suppose Rue falls in love with him?"

"Why, my dear Aunt, then she must fall out again," he rejoins in a light tone.

"Be serious, Valentine. Come here a moment," and she points to a seat beside her on the sofa and he drops into it. His hazel eyes are smiling—his lips are smiling too—he does not seem in the very least inclined to follow her ladyship's injunction.

"I do not think you realise," she says with extreme gravity, "that Rue is actually free—perfectly free to set her affections upon whom she pleases. There is nothing in the world to bind her but her father's wish. Of course we all consider it a settled thing that she shall marry you—it is our dearest wish—but we must not forget that the matter is in her own power. If she really cared for some one else more than for you, she

might feel that the happiness of her life was not to be sacrificed even to so sacred a thing as a dead father's wish."

Lord Valentine's eyes begin to flash.

"Do you mean to say," he cries, "that Rue would have so little sense of honour as to——"

"My dear boy," the Countess interrupts him, "I mean to say nothing—we cannot judge of circumstances until they arise. What I want to impress upon you is that you are unwise not only in showing Rue so little attention yourself, but in wilfully bringing her into close contact with another man, whom she is inclined to like."

Lord Valentine starts up and marches to the end of the room—then he returns and confronts his aunt.

"Do you suppose," he says with a wrathful look in his handsome eyes, "that if I were to fall ever so desperately in love with another woman, I should ever dream of giving Rue up? I thought the first prin-

ple of every Ormond," (proudly), "was the honour of his house. I thought it was the first wish of all of us to see the title and lands of Valentine united again. I have the title —Rue has the estates, and I confess it never occurred to me," (with extreme haughtiness), "that I should be the chief gainer by the marriage."

His proud look and tones are eminently becoming to him—his sincerity is beyond a doubt. He shares to the full his late uncle's belief that to be Countess Valentine is as proud a title as any woman need aspire to.

"My dear," says his aunt softly, not ill-pleased by the attitude he has taken up, "do not forget that the case I put to you is purely hypothetical. I am perfectly certain that at the present moment Rue looks upon her engagement to you as irrevocable; but we older people," (sighing), "are apt to look more ahead. If Sir Everard should fall in love with her, and she should respond, do you suppose he would not use his utmost

powers of persuasion to make her believe that it was not only her right, but her positive duty to consult her own heart? That is why I am sorry that you have asked him here."

"Well, it can't be helped now," rejoins Lord Valentine. "Besides, one cannot shut her up in a box until our wedding-day. She must see other men, and if she chooses to throw me over," (the angry look coming back), "well, I suppose I shall survive it. But I confess this is the first time such a possibility ever entered my brain."

"My dear boy," says Lady Valentine laying her hand on his arm, "why do you not lay yourself out a little more to win her affection? You can make yourself extremely fascinating to women when you choose. Rue is very lovely—you rarely see anyone so beautiful—I should have thought it would not be a very hard task to—to—"

"Rue would laugh in my face if I made love to her. And," (with a little gesture

of disinclination), "I couldn't do it. How can a fellow make love to a girl that he has been brought up with?"

"But, Valentine, what possible prospect of happiness is there for a marriage where there is no love to start with?"

"Oh! Auntie, now-a-days I don't think much love, spoony love, you know, is wanted for marriage. The great thing is to feel you have the same interests; then if you have enough liking not to be repulsive to each other, I think you're sure to get along."

A strange doctrine from the lips of so amatively disposed a young gentleman as Lord Valentine.

The Countess sighs—she feels there is no more to be said. Well, she has warned him; if disappointment be in store for him, he will have no one to thank but himself.

"Good night, my dear," she says; "it is getting late, and Hawke will be impatient."

"Good night, dear Auntie—pleasant dreams!" and he stoops and kisses her.



affectionately. “To-morrow,” (laughing), “I will begin and make desperate love to Rue to counteract the baleful effect of De-lorraine’s visit.”

But the morrow finds the heedless young fellow, as usual, with no eyes or ears for anyone but Lady Chaloner.

Perhaps the reason why no one attributes much importance to this flirtation is that her ladyship, (in public at all events), affects to treat Lord Valentine in a laughing, patronising way, as though he were only just a remove from an Eton boy. This manner rather annoys him, but it is successful with the rest of the party. Sir Philip is very far from feeling any uneasiness of the kind that Vere Cleveland’s attentions had caused him.

Friday comes, and with it Sir Everard. All day Rue has been in the highest spirits, and Lady Valentine has thought it right to speak a few serious words in private to her lovely daughter.

“My dear child,” she says to her very

gravely, "I do trust that you will be careful how you behave to Sir Everard, and that you will not encourage any false hopes in him. Remember that you are in honour bound to your cousin—that it was your father's dying wish that you should marry him."

"My darling mother," replies the girl, "is there any fear of my forgetting that solemn fact? Are not Val and I as good as married already? But," (with a little pout), "he amuses himself, and why should not I?"

"It is a very dangerous amusement," replies Lady Valentine—"if you begin in fun, how long can you guarantee yourself from falling into earnest? Suppose, my dear child, that you did get to like Sir Everard so much that it made the thought of marrying your cousin distasteful to you?"

"Oh, I should never *mind* marrying Val," replies Rue; "there is nothing repulsive about him."

Lady Valentine sighs. It is on her lips to say that all other men are repulsive when you love one, but she refrains.

“Well, darling,” she remarks, “you must consider Sir Everard too. Pray let him understand that your engagement to your cousin is irrevocable, and do not sit or talk apart with him.”

Lady Rue pouts.

“Oh, mother dear, don’t spoil all my pleasure. I want to have a real good flirtation, and I have been looking forward to it ever so.”

“I have no patience with Val,” says her mother betraying considerable irritation. “It was most inconsiderate of him to ask Sir Everard here.”

“Oh, he doesn’t mind,” laughs Rue. “And I don’t mind his flirting with Lady Chaloner. What an admirable couple we shall make when we are married, shan’t we! We shall be so used to each letting the other go his own way that we shall

never have any little squabbles or jealousies."

"When you *are* married," thinks Lady Valentine ruefully. Just at present she by no means looks upon their union as a *fait accompli*.

CHAPTER V.

THE DANGERS OF SUNDAY.

SIR EVERARD has arrived. He is a tall, dark, fine-looking man, with a somewhat cold and reserved manner, except when he is talking to or looking at Lady Rue. Then he unbends altogether from his sternness; his dark eyes soften, the lines in his face curve to smiles, the look of indifference is changed to one of eager interest—in fact, Eros, having melted him by the fires of love, moulds him into an altogether new shape and presentment.

Sir Everard, in accepting Lord Valentine's invitation, has done so with a thorough conviction that he is acting un-

wisely—that he is preparing for himself many hours of disquietude if not of unhappiness ; but—what man, bidden to bask in the sunshine of his love's smiles, has courage to refuse ? He is in love with Rue, and he is perfectly aware of the fact. But he is also aware that she is betrothed to her cousin, and that his own love is therefore hopeless ; if his wings get scorched at the flame, he will be the only sufferer. He accepts the condition of possible—nay, most probable suffering. Were Lord Valentine an ardent lover, and Lady Rue responsive, Sir Everard would have kept himself well out of sight of blandishments that it would have been eminently repulsive to him to witness. Such, however, was by no means the case, as we know. So he accepted the invitation to the Court, and his usually well-regulated heart thrilled with a rare sensation as lovely Rue came forward to greet him on his arrival. Matters went worse—far worse than Lady Valentine had feared.

The pair were absolutely inseparable—sat together apart, walked, rode, went on the water, always together, and she could not prevent it. In this matter Rue eclipsed herself in wilfulness. Even Lord Valentine, engrossed as he was with Lady Chaloner, began to feel enraged and disgusted, and to treat her with an air of imperious proprietorship that made the other man burn to kick him. As for Rue, she laughed her cousin to scorn, and behaved to him with a saucy indifference that irritated him beyond measure. On the Saturday evening, he went so far as to quit Lady Chaloner's side and to cross over to where Sir Everard and Rue were engaged in deepest converse and seat himself beside her. Lady Rue seems to be quite unaware of his proximity. His handsome face wears a look of anger and irritation.

“Come, Rue,” he says with an air of authority, “sing something. You have not sung for an age.”

Rue goes on talking to Sir Everard as though no other person existed.

“Rue,” says her future lord sharply.

“Yes, dear,” (turning as if for the first time aware of his vicinity).

“Are you going to sing?” (irritably).

“Who—I? No, Val, certainly not. What an idea!”

“I thought,” he returned with some asperity, “that it was the duty of a hostess to endeavour to amuse her guests.”

“So I am,” she replies with arch impertinence; “I am doing my best to amuse Sir Everard. I hope,” (turning to the latter), “that I am succeeding.”

Sir Everard answers her with a look that suggests “pistols and coffee for two” to Lord Valentine’s irritated mind.

“Why don’t you do the same, Val?” continues Rue sweetly. “Instead of wasting your time here, why don’t you go and amuse some one? See, there is poor Lady Chaloner all by herself, and looking so

dreadfully bored too. You might be able to cheer her up; at all events, you would be better than no one."

How excellent are the restraints that civilisation and society put upon angry passions! It is written plainly in Lord Valentine's face so that "he who runs may read" that he desires ardently to box Rue's ears, to shake her, to drag her away, (perhaps by her golden hair), from Sir Everard's side; but he is forced to content himself with an expressive scowl, and to leave her to his rival.

"It is true, I suppose," says Sir Everard in a low voice, "that you are engaged to marry your cousin?"

"Quite true," she answers lightly. "It is a bore, is it not, having one's matrimonial arrangements made for one?"

He does not answer. He looks upon it as something so intensely serious that he cannot bring himself to speak flippantly about it. This exquisite creature to become

the property of that ill-tempered young cub, (even men when they are jealous are apt to be unjust), who is as incapable of appreciating her as the traditional swine the pearl. It is a thought to make angels weep. And she, poor unconscious darling, seems scarcely alive to the cruelty of her fate.

“What right have people,” he says presently in a deep, indignant voice, “to legislate for their children in a mattter that may be life or death to the happiness of their whole lives!”

“It is all because the title and the horrid property are divided,” replies Rue airily. “Now if I had only had a brother, the difficulty would have been avoided.”

“But,” says Sir Everard in a tone of deep feeling, “can you reconcile yourself to this dreadful sacrifice?”

Rue laughs.

“Well, you see, it is quite as great a bore for poor Val as it is for me.”

“Oh!” utters Sir Everard, drawing a

deep breath at this, to him, novel way of looking at it. A bore to marry this lovely darling !

“ And, you know,” continues Rue, thinking it only fair, for Val’s sake, to make the best of him, “ we are cousins, and have been almost brought up together, so we are quite used to each other.”

“ I think,” remarks Sir Everard, “ that he was endeavouring to use a little more than cousinly authority,” (curse his impudence !—this, however, was a strict aside, and did not pass his lips), “ over you just now.”

“ But he did not get the best of it,” says Rue looking up archly—“ did he ?”

“ No,” responds Sir Everard with a sigh of content, “ that he certainly did not.”

Sunday is a dangerous day for the affections; idleness, of course, being at the root of the danger. I suppose there is more love made on Sunday, and more mischief done by it, than on all the other six days of the

week put together. People are deprived of their usual avocations and amusements ; they do not, (as a rule), drive, ride, play lawn-tennis or croquet—walking and talking are alone left to them. Naturally, then, in a country house, a man attaches himself to his affinity, and strolls about the park or garden with her, or if, which the Fates forbid !—if it be wet, he seeks with her what privacy may be found in the corner of a room.

I am always sorry to see a wet Sunday, and think regretfully of all those poor lovers who have no chance of other than *al fresco* meetings, and to whom a drenching Sabbath is as formidable an obstacle as the wall which divided Pyramus and Thisbe.

The Sunday that Sir Everard spent at Valentine Court was the most delightful one that can be imagined—deliciously hot, tempered by balmy airs. The whole party went to church in the morning—the afternoon worshippers, however, were few, and com-

prised only Lady Valentine, Sir Philip, Barbara, and Pauline. Poor little girls! they had no inducement to stay away. Lord Valentine and Lady Chaloner had betaken themselves to the boat on the big piece of water, where they were moored under a tree. Sir Everard and Rue were wandering about the grounds. Rhona and Jack were sitting in the garden, beneath the shade of a big tree. Colonel Dorian had gone off to call on the Lennoxes, having vainly tried to induce Jack to bear him company.

“I suppose it is a fact,” says Rhona who has just caught sight of Rue’s white dress amongst the trees, to Colonel Ormond, “that Lord Valentine is engaged to his cousin?”

“It is very much a fact,” returns Jack. “It was my poor brother’s hobby that our house should be restored to its pristine glory. A very laudable hobby, but I hardly think in this case the end justifies the means. It is a very hazardous experiment

to arrange a marriage without consulting the inclinations of the parties to it. We are having a pretty good illustration of the danger—look at Rue!" pointing with his eyes to where that young lady is engaged in animated conversation with Sir Everard—“look at Valentine!”

“And yet,” says Rhona, “what a charming couple they make. She is perfectly lovely and he is so good-looking and so nice—they seem made for each other.”

“Yes,” answers Jack. “I daresay, now, if they had been left alone, they would have fallen in love with each other quite naturally.”

“But after all,” says Rhona thoughtfully, “love marriages do not always ensure unqualified bliss. People who make them are not invariably ‘happy ever after.’”

Oh! if this time last year Rhona could have imagined that she would ever give utterance to such rank treason.

“At all events they start with a better chance,” observes Jack.

“And yet,” pursues Rhona unconscious that she is betraying herself to her listener, “a girl who marries without being desperately in love with her husband is less likely to suffer from disappointment afterwards.”

“Why should there be disappointment?” asks Jack.

“Because,” answers Rhona thoughtfully —“because I think a man who is very much in love leads a woman to expect too much. Have you ever been very much in love?” and she turns and fixes her large eyes with an interested gaze upon her companion.

He smiles. “I have fancied myself so.”

“Have you ever been engaged to be married?”

“No! never!” (emphatically).

“Well, if you had been,” continues Rhona with extreme gravity, “you would have heaped the lady of your affections

with flattery—you would have had no eyes for anyone else—you would have sworn to her ten thousand times that she was the most charming creature in the world—you would have drawn pictures to her of the future and of all the delightful things that you would do together in it—you would have made her believe that you were the most ardent lover the world contained."

Jack looks into her eyes and smiles.

"I hope I should," he says.

"I think you would," she responds with unabated gravity, "because you look like a man to do anything you undertook thoroughly. Well!" (changing her tone), "then you would have married her and she would probably have become very fond of you—then," (sadly, and with a wistful look in her eyes), "then, as she became ever more passionately attached to you, your ardour would gradually have waned for her—you would by degrees have dropped all those sweet flatteries that would give her infinite

ly more pleasure now than formerly—you would repel her advances by indifference—you would have begun to find fault with instead of praising her--instead of assuring her that she was the most perfect of her sex, you would be always trying to prove to her that no other woman ever possessed so many defects as she does, or was so calculated to vex and provoke a man."

"Poor little girl!" thinks Jack quite aware that Rhona is unintentionally telling him her own story but most anxious to conceal from her that he recognises it.

"I daresay I should have done all you say," he answers lightly, "it is fortunate for one of your sex that I have remained a bachelor."

"Oh!" says Rhona quickly, "please don't think I meant to say a word against you personally—I am sure you are one of the kindest and best of men——"

"Thank you, Mrs. Dorian," says Jack laughing. "I was beginning to feel a little

hurt by your having such a bad opinion of me."

"It was not a bad opinion indeed—it would not have been your fault. I only meant that men were like that—at least," (here she grows confused, remembering that she may seem to be making reflections upon her husband), "some men. But, after all, I daresay it is really the woman's fault—she does not understand a man, or know at first how to please him."

"Let me tell you my theory about the difficulty," says Jack feigning not to remark her confusion. "A man does not as a rule marry till he is well on to thirty. He has then been for many years absolutely his own master—that is as absolutely as circumstances and his profession, if he has one, have permitted. At all events, he can go where he likes, see whom he likes, make his plans without consulting anyone. A woman, you see, never enjoys this sort of freedom—she is always dependent upon

the habits and wishes of other people. Well, a man marries. All of a sudden, he finds himself tied down to rules and hours ; he must give an account, (for you know, Mrs. Dorian, women are exacting, and the fonder they are of you the more exacting they show themselves)—he must give an account of everything he does, everyone he sees—he must be prepared to be questioned and dictated to and found fault with. If he smokes a cigar with a friend, he must perhaps jump up in the middle for fear of keeping my lady waiting ; if he dines with men and sits up late, he may be pretty sure of being met with a frown when he gets home ; if he calls upon an old and intimate friend of the fair sex, a wrong construction may be put upon his visit, and he may have a very *mauvais quart d'heure* at home for having done a perfectly natural and innocent thing."

Rhona blushes and thinks of Mrs. Orme.
Is Jack thinking of her too ?

"A man hates to be fettered and restricted," pursues Jack. "If," (laughing), "I may compare him to anything so innocent; he is like a bird, or a kitten, or a puppy that a child lavishes caresses upon whilst holding it tight in its arms all the time. The creature struggles to get away, and ignores the blandishments that are accompanied by force. If a woman could only make up her mind to let a man come and go when he likes, to ask few questions, and to greet him with smiles, both would be much happier."

"Yes," says Rhona with a shade of bitterness, "that would be easy enough if the woman were indifferent, but not if she loves a man with all her heart. But now, tell me, Colonel Ormond, suppose the positions were reversed—suppose the man stayed at home and the woman went out—would he be content to let her come and go, and ask no questions—to dine alone, to spend his

evenings alone, and to greet her with smiles when she chose to return?"

Jack laughs.

"My mind refuses altogether to grasp such a reversal of the natural order of things," he answers. "There is Gustav!"

"Let us go and meet him," says Rhona rising.

Lady Rue is spending the most delightful afternoon. The pleasure of it is accented, perhaps, by a slight sense of guilt, and by the remembrance that her happiness is doomed to be so short-lived. She comes down in the evening to dinner, looking lovelier than ever—all in white, with a string of pearls round her beautiful throat, her hair arrayed something after the manner of the old portrait, and looking a living challenge to the lovely Duchess. Poor Sir Everard! is he not already slain?

Forlorn Pauline finds a sad pleasure in watching the pair as they sit opposite

to her. Lady Rue has a new identity to-night—she is not the bright, wilful, mischievous creature, full of vivacity and *espièglerie* that Pauline has hitherto known—there is a new softness and graciousness in her manner, a lovely diffidence, a little look of appeal in her blue eyes, as though she had found a master whom fain she would please. And Sir Everard—there is an even greater transformation in him. Pauline had thought him cold and proud—had found his voice harsh, abrupt ; but now, love sits in his eyes, and looks with melting softness through them at the dear face upturned to his ; his voice has taken the softest, most caressing accents ; the humility of worship has toned down the roughness and sternness of the strong man ; self is subservient to the master passion.

Tyro though Pauline is, she is swift to recognize the difference between the bold, fiery looks Lord Valentine bestows on his fair neighbour, and the tender deference that

dwells in Sir Everard's eyes when he turns them on Rue—she knows full well which love is the better worth having. How will it all end? she wonders. And her busy brain weaves a romance of hopeless love for the pair who are too absorbed in each other to know that they are observed—the pair whose love at this moment is so satisfied and prosperous.

Sir Everard's heart beats high to-night—he has taken a resolve—he means to make an effort, at least, to win this exquisite creature at whose feet his heart is laid. He is not deficient in a sense of honour—if Lord Valentine had shown any evidence that he valued Rue, it would never have entered Sir Everard's mind to try to wrest her from him—he would have kept out of her way. It was the difference between plucking a gem from a man's breast and picking it up when he had flung it carelessly aside. Evidently all he wanted was the lands and wealth of which she was the heiress—if he

could inherit them without her, would he not be as well content—the fool ! And why not ?

Sir Everard came to the conclusion that in case of Rue failing to fulfil her part of the contract, her inheritance would go to her cousin. If not, what was there for one moment to bind her to the sacrifice ? And would not he gladly, thankfully take her own gracious self, without an acre of land or a coin of gold ? Had he not amply enough for both ?

His mind was made up for action, but the opportunity did not present itself quite so readily. Whether some malicious spirit of the air had whispered a warning in Lord Valentine's ear, or whether Sir Everard's looks and manner betrayed him, it is idle to speculate ; but, as a fact, the young gentleman hovered about Rue in a manner that made it impossible for the other man to begin any serious conversation with her. Lady Chaloner, however, came to the rescue.

“Are you going to spend all this heavenly evening in-doors?” she asked; and Rue, jumping up, exclaimed,

“No; let us go out.”

But when they had crossed the drawbridge, and were in the garden, Lord Valentine persistently kept by his cousin’s side, not because he wanted to be with her, but because he wanted to keep Sir Everard away. Lady Chaloner is not pleased—being purely selfish, the interests of other people concern her not—all she cares for is to be amused and paid court to.

“Come, Sir Everard,” she says pettishly after a minute, “I think you and I had better pair off, and leave these *lovers* to themselves. I fear we are *de trop*.”

But Sir Everard, being dark, does not admire Lady Chaloner, who is also dark, nor does he feel the slightest desire for her companionship—in fact, he could at this moment think of nothing that would be so hateful to him as to be forced to endure her

flippant conversation whilst the darling of his heart was with another man.

Rue comes to his aid.

“ You must not neglect Lady Chaloner even for me, Val,” she says archly, and slips away to the other side of Sir Everard. Then Caprice leaves Sir Everard, and, turning to Lord Valentine, murmur in a plaintive undertone accompanied by a glance from her melting eyes,

“ And this time to-morrow I shall not be here.”

That is enough for him—prudence and Rue are thrown to the winds—this lovely starlight night; the charm of the fleeting hour, the presence that has such a great delight for him; these things are not to be sacrificed for mere prudential considerations. So the four pair off, and, whether consciously or unconsciously, their feet carry them in opposite directions, and as far away from each other as possible.

His time has come and Sir Everard’s

strong heart beats madly ; his pulses throb with expectation, hope, fear—he knows not what. Until the last few days, he has considered life a very endurable thing when accompanied by position, means, and health such as he is endowed with ; but to-night he contemplates it from a new standpoint ; on the one side he sees “all Heaven in flower ;” has a vision of possible joy and delight that thrills his heart through—on the other, he sees but a waste of blackness and despair. Here, by his side, is the lovely angel who holds the keys of the realms of bliss or whose little hand can push him into outer darkness.

He is so agitated, that, for some moments, whilst they are gradually putting a considerable distance between themselves and the other pair, he can find nothing to say. Rue instinctively feels that something serious is impending, and is half nervous, half elated. She knows he is going to tell her of his love ; she feels it will be wrong to listen, but,

poor little maid ! her own heart is gone from her. She means to do what is right; she has no thought of giving up her cousin, but oh ! she thinks, since she must forego so much in the future, let her have the happiness of being sure that once in her life she is beloved. Young girls think so much of a love declaration : they are not sceptical of men's vows as older women are.

They are in the long avenue of trees now; not even a glimpse of Lady Chaloner's white gown is visible in the distance. The birds have gone to roost, a great hush is fallen on everything, they are alone with the trees and the stars—oh blessed *solitude à deux*, when one loves !

Sir Everard breaks the silence.

“And this time to-morrow,” he says with a tremor in his grave voice, “I shall be a long way from here. When, I wonder, shall I see you again ?”

Rue wants to speak, but, somehow, words do not come to her with their wonted ease.

"It depends upon you," Sir Everard continues, and now he has stopped and is stooping to look eagerly in her face. He is taking her hand. "You know that I love you," and his voice assumes a wondrously soft tone. "I feel as if all my life hung upon winning your love now. I know," (giving her no time to speak), "of your engagement to your cousin, but having seen you together, I cannot think for a moment that ought to be binding. You do not care for him, and he, idiot that he is ! does not seem to be in love with you."

"No," answers Rue a little drearily, "we are not in love with each other."

"It seems to me," continues Sir Everard hurriedly, "that the only object of this marriage is to connect the title and the estates again; if that were done, every object would be gained. Tell me, do you set so much store by your family? Would the fact of being Lady Valentine compensate you for a loveless marriage?"

“No,” answers Rue frankly. “I am afraid there is something wrong about me, for I don’t seem at all to have inherited the Ormond feeling of its own importance.”

“Then,” says Sir Everard eagerly, “let me ask you one more question ! If—if you were not engaged to your cousin, do you—is it possible that if I had been free to ask your love, you might have given it to me ?”

Rue turns away her face.

“Tell me darling,” he whispers.

She looks up at him with tears in her eyes.

“Do not speak of such a thing !” she says, her voice quivering, “it is wrong. Nothing can prevent my marrying Valentine.”

“Why not ?” he cries eagerly, “if matters can be arranged. If you took me instead of him and gave up all you have, indeed you would be no worse off. My family is as old as yours—Deloraine, if not so

picturesque as this, is a finer place. I want nothing but your own dear self—I would rather by far have you come to me with nothing and take all that I possess. Oh, my darling ! why should you not give up this place and all belonging to it to your cousin, and marry a man who worships you from the bottom of his heart?"

It is a new idea to Rue and a most fascinating one. Why not ? The only reason that has made her feel herself bound to Lord Valentine is that it would be cruel to disappoint him of an inheritance that he has grown to look upon as his own ; but if he could still have it all the same and she marry the man she loves ; who would be cruel enough to want to prevent her being happy ? At the bare thought of so much bliss, a great joy and radiance seems to enfold her—she acknowledges to herself that this is the lord and sovereign of her heart—that she feels for him as she has never yet felt for any man. And as she lifts her eyes

to his face, he sees there the lovely gift she has bestowed upon him, and stooping, gathers her to his beating heart. She makes a faint resistance as though in obedience to the dictates of her conscience. It does not seem very wrong, though, since, with the rapidity of jumping at conclusions that is youth's prerogative, she looks upon it almost as a settled affair that she will marry Sir Everard.

Some time after, when they are walking towards the house, the difficulty of the position asserts itself to her mind with more seriousness. Sir Everard, with an impatience unusual to the gravity of his nature, is all for having an interview with Lady Valentine at once, but Rue feels that the project which for years has been looked upon as settled, cannot in the nature of things be annihilated at once. And she has an uneasy sense that her cousin, though he does not love her, is not the man to give her up without a struggle. He is head-

strong and wilful and would bear thwarting very badly indeed. There might be a violent scene between the two men—nothing more probable.

“You see,” she says very gently to her lover, “it is hardly likely that Valentine will consent to give me up all at once. He is very proud, and at first, perhaps, he would be indignant at my offering to give up everything to him and would refuse point-blank, but perhaps, in time, he might be persuaded.”

Sir Everard looks at the lovely creature beside him and wonders what on earth she could not persuade a man to, (except to give her up). But then Lord Valentine, mercifully, does not regard her with the same eyes.

So it is settled that nothing is to be done abruptly—that Sir Everard is to leave as proposed the next morning—that Rue is to discover from her mother without confessing anything, if it is in her power to give up

Valentine to her cousin, and that she is then to write to her lover in London. Chafe though he may at the delay, he cannot but feel that this is the only course that can be taken with propriety. There is a question however that he is burning to ask.

“If,” he says at last—“if, by some misfortune, it should not be in your power to give up your rights to your cousin—”

“Then,” answers Rue sadly but with determination—“then I *must* marry him. There is nothing else for it.”

At this moment the subject of their conversation is seen coming towards them in hot haste.

“Are you going to stay out *all* night?” he says, addressing Rue with some roughness; a flame of anger burning in his eyes. “I have been looking for you everywhere.”

Sir Everard feels a wild desire to take this dictatorial young man by the throat,

but Rue hastens to say with unusual sweetness, the outcome of a guilty conscience probably,

“We are coming, dear boy; it is such a heavenly night, it seems a shame to go in.”

“‘Dear boy!’ Cursed young brute!” thinks Sir Everard.

“Oh, stop out pray, if you like!” retorts Lord Valentine irefully, “only the draw-bridges will be up in three minutes, so that if you do, you’ll have to make a night of it.”

And with that, he turns his back upon and precedes them to the house.

“And they would marry you to an ill-tempered young fool like that!” murmurs Sir Everard resentfully. (For what man in the first blush of his passion thinks that *he* could ever speak harshly to his adored one?)

“Oh, he is not ill-tempered, indeed,”

answered Rue apologetically ; "that is only his little way."

Sir Everard makes no rejoinder, but reflects to himself that Lord Valentine's "little way" is a most infernally disagreeable and impertinent one, and one that kicking might prove extremely beneficial to.

CHAPTER VI.

PRACTISING FORBIDDEN ARTS.

M^ONDAY has come, the guests are gone: only Colonel Ormond and Lord Valentine remain. The latter, to whom a woman to make love to is an absolute necessity, is making himself charming to Pauline again, and she, poor little girl! now that Lady Chaloner is out of the way, is not proof against his fascinations. She has sung to him for more than an hour this afternoon, and Barbara, so kind for the last ten days, has been a little snappish with her. Rue is silent and pensive; she does not retort upon her cousin who is unusually brusque with her—indeed, her manner towards him is unwontedly soft and gentle.

He takes advantage of this to give himself great airs, accepting it as a proof of conscious guilt on her part in the matter of Sir Everard. Before he leaves the Court, he intends to tell her in a manner that will leave no doubt of his seriousness, that he will have no more of this philandering.

Evening comes—he is still beside Pauline, still troubling her tender soul with these glances whose value she should surely be in a position to appraise now. Rue has laid her hand softly on Jack's arm, and bidden him come out in the park with her. She does not take her way to that avenue where yesternight she paced with her love—that is sacred to his memory—but leads towards the turfed path that slopes downwards to the entrance gate.

Jack has a hearty admiration for his lovely niece—he has a suspicion that she has some confidence for his ear. Well, she is quite sure of his sympathy, and help too, if she needs, and he can give it. At first, how-

ever, Rue confines herself to generalities, but when they come to a rustic bench, she pauses beside it, and turning abruptly to him says,

“Jack, I want to ask you a question.” And then she seats herself and looks straight before her. “If,” (and the lovely face blushes rosy red, though the night softly veils it)—“if I were not to marry Valentine after all, what would happen?”

“It would happen,” replies Jack very coolly, and not betraying the slightest surprise, “that Valentine would have to look about him for another wife—another heiress if possible.”

“But, Jack,” cries Rue with great vivacity, “is there nothing to bind me to marry him?”

“Nothing but the remembrance of your father’s wish.”

Somewhat to Jack’s surprise, the next words of his interlocutor are spoken in tones of the deepest dejection.

“If I do not marry him, shall not I lose this place and the money?”

“You will lose nothing but himself.”

“Oh! Jack, are you sure?”

“As sure as that we are sitting here.”

There is a pause. When the next utterance issues from Rue’s lips, Jack well conjectures that there are tears in her eyes.

“Don’t you think it very unfair, Jack, to bind people down to marrying when they do not care for each other?”

Jack hesitates. He does think it cruel, but he does not wish to blame his dead brother.

“You see, my dear,” he says evasively, “it depends so much upon circumstances. When two people are both young, well-looking, and promising in all respects, and there are very grave considerations to make the marriage desirable, it hardly seems as if there could be very much hardship in the matter.”

“But it is a hardship; the most dreadful

hardship possible, to marry a man you do not love," cries Rue vehemently.

"You may get to love him," says Jack who is arguing against his own convictions.

"And suppose you love some one else?" murmurs Rue turning away—she does not very much mind Jack knowing the truth.

"That would be a bad job," he replies gravely.

Rue comes a little nearer to him, and lays her hand on his arm.

"Jack," she says pleadingly, as if the fiat lay with him, "if, after all, I do not marry Valentine, can I not, of my own will, give up this place and the estate to him?"

Jack shakes his head.

"Impossible, my dear. In the first place, if it were in your power, no man of spirit would accept such a gift; in the second, even supposing you give it up to him for your life-time, if you married another man and had children, they are bound to inherit

it. So that if you gave and he accepted it for a term, it would only be to return to comparative poverty after having enjoyed a handsome possession for some time. So you see it is impossible on all hands. But, child, why trouble your little head about the matter—you have nearly three years of freedom still before you—why not wait and see what turns up?"

"If, by my giving him up, he must lose everything," murmurs Rue in a tone of deepest despondency, "why, then, it is certain that I must marry him."

And a little sob, that cuts Jack to the heart, escapes her. He takes her hand and kisses it as an expression of sympathy.

"My dear child," he says gravely, "if it were really a question of the happiness or misery of your life, there would be no must about it. Neither your mother, your friends, nor even Valentine himself could wish it. But where there is so much involved, I don't think you ought to make up

your mind hastily one way or another.
Wait a little."

"Waiting will make no difference," murmurs Rue drearily.

Jack is perplexed. He would like to speak to her about Sir Everard, but, until she mentions his name, is reticent of alluding to him. For Jack, with the kindest heart in the world, has all a woman's delicacy of feeling, or rather, I should say, all the delicacy of feeling that is ascribed to women, but in which, alas! they are often wanting.

"Time does so much," he says, and is rather disgusted with himself for the utterance of such a platitude.

"It does not make you want to marry one man when you care for another. Oh, Jack, I know you won't betray me, but—but——"

Rue, however, seems unable to get any further without assistance.

"It is Deloraine, is it not?" he says very gently.

She only answers by a gesture.

“But, my dear little girl, is it not rather sudden? You know, sometimes these violent fancies are not doomed to be very lasting.”

“I *know* I shall never care for anyone else,” says Rue, with a voice that has the ring of conviction in it. “I saw a great many men this season, and it amused me to laugh and talk and flirt with them, and one or two I liked very much, but none of them ever made me shudder at the thought of marrying Valentine afterwards.”

“And you do now?”

“Yes,” (hanging her head). “It is very curious—I have two distinct ideas about him. I am fond of him as my cousin, but I hate him as a lover.”

And she gives a little shiver that speaks volumes.

“Have you spoken to your mother?” asks Jack, feeling that the case looks very bad indeed for his nephew.

“Oh, no, I wanted to know about the will first.”

“And now that you do know?”

“Oh, there is nothing for it, I suppose,” says Rue hopelessly.

“But, my dear child, (pray do not think me inquisitive)—surely nothing can have passed between you and Deloraine!”

“He thought I might give up this place to Valentine—he would rather have me without anything—he has plenty for us both.”

Jack feels rather indignant with Sir Everard. As a man of the world, as a man of honour, he had no right to speak of love to the affianced wife of another man.

“Deloraine was very wrong,” he begins with some severity, but Rue interrupts him with flashing eyes.

“Do not say a word against him! He is the best, noblest man in the world.”

So Jack sees that he had better hold his tongue.

After a pause of considerable duration, he says,

“ I think, Rue, the best thing you can do is to tell everything to your mother.”

“ No,” she answers sadly, “ it would be of no use.”

And then lovely, light-hearted Rue, to whom tears are unknown, falls to bitter weeping, and Jack, with his heart wrung by the pitiful sight, knows not how to comfort her. He would like to see her happy, but he is fond of Valentine too, and does not want to say anything to hinder the lad’s prospects. Presently Rue recovers herself, and they stroll back to the house.

“ You won’t betray me, will you?” she pleads, and he answers gravely,

“ My dear child, I hope you know that you may trust me.”

“ I cannot come into the drawing-room to-night,” she continues. “ Tell them I am tired, and have gone to bed. Be sure you don’t let Mamma come to me.”

Jack goes into the drawing-room alone, where he finds Lord Valentine playing “fish-ponds” with Barbara and Pauline. They are all laughing merrily as they make futile attempts to catch their fish. Jack can hardly believe that these are the same little sad faces that have won his pity so often during the last ten days. The irony of fate strikes him for the ten thousandth time. Here are these two girls hanging upon Valentine’s looks and words, either of whom, as Jack believes, would regard it as the most enviable fate in the world to belong to him, and here is Rue betrothed to him, and crying and shuddering at her hard lot.

Lady Valentine is writing letters—fortunately no one enquires for Rue. She, meantime, has locked herself in her room, and told her maid through the keyhole, to the young lady’s great astonishment, that she will not require her services any more that night. Then the poor child seats herself at

her writing-table to pen her last farewell to her true love.

“ My dear Sir Everard,” she begins.

Then the tears gather in her eyes, for she remembers that he is not nor ever will be *her* Sir Everard. She takes another sheet and writes—

“ DEAR SIR EVERARD,

“ I have asked my uncle about the will, and he tells me that I cannot give up anything to Valentine, so I must marry him. Do not think any more about me.” But as she writes this dreadful admonition, two big swift pearls roll down her cheeks, and melt into the paper. She is about to take a fresh sheet and begin again, but then she thinks sorrowfully that she would like him to know how bitter a pang it costs her to bid him farewell. It would do her heart good, poor little soul, if she could know how those two big blisters will be kissed and kissed again by the man for whom the

tears are shed. "I should like you," she continues, "to write to me just once to say you forgive me, and that you do not think I am to blame, and then we had better never write to each other or see each other again." (Here innumerable more tears fall, but are not allowed to rest on the paper.)

"Believe me, dear Sir Everard,

"*Always* yours sincerely,

"RUTH V. ORMOND."

And the next morning, when she is out driving, she gives the letter in a sandwich between two others to her groom to post. Sir Everard, who has been waiting for it with feverish impatience, receives it the following morning.

Pauline, although she had been so cruelly awakened from her romantic dream about Lord Valentine, had not left off painting his picture. What pleasure such an occupation could give her when she knew that

she held no smallest place in his heart or thoughts, it is impossible to say, but every day found her at work with untiring zeal on the portrait. And when it was finished, a very exquisite piece of work it was. No one could deny that it was a striking likeness, but she had so embellished, refined, and beautified every feature that, instead of being the picture of a good-looking young man, it might have been an ideal portrait of Antinous himself. Pauline, however, did not think she had done more than bare justice to the original. When it was finished, she, ungrateful girl, took from the locket that she wore round her neck, the miniature of her benefactor, and replaced it by that of the man to whom she owed nothing but pain and grief.

Now it happened that the day after Lady Chaloner's departure from the Court, Lord Valentine and Pauline were sitting in one of the window seats of the morning-room. For the moment they were alone. The

girl was leaning back against the shutter—the young man was bending a little forward talking to her in his usual animated manner. Presently as his eyes roved out of the window, he exclaimed—

“Confound it! there’s a rabbit in the garden.”

Pauline jumped up to look—the string of beads on which her locket hung caught in the hook of the shutter, broke, the beads flew in different directions—the locket fell sharply on the floor and the miniature bounced out under Lord Valentine’s very eyes.

“By Jove!” cried the young man picking it up and colouring to his very hair with pleasure. Poor Pauline! words are but weak things to describe the agony of shame that devoured her.

“Oh, please give it me!” she gasped stretching out her hand, but he caught and detained it whilst with the other he held the picture above her reach and gazed at

it with much the same pleasure as Narcissus may have derived from contemplating himself in the fountain. Pauline actually began to cry with mortification.

“Don’t cry, my darling!” said the young man tenderly, and with that, he suddenly put his arm round the girl and kissed her. Really his ideas on this subject were shamefully lax.

As for Pauline, overcome by all these new emotions, she sank trembling back on her seat in a state of painful bewilderment. Lord Valentine, by this time, is grovelling on the floor under the chairs and tables to pick up the stray beads and it presently occurs to the girl to assist him in the task. She regains her locket but he has still tight hold of the picture.

“Won’t you please give it me back?” she implores when as many beads as can be found have been picked up, and he answers,

“Yes, but tell me first where you got it. Did you paint it?”

Hanging her head she faintly answers,
“Yes.”

“How clever you are!” he says admiringly. “Why, you can do everything. But you have flattered me shamefully. This is a proper good-looking fellow,” and he returns to a pleased contemplation of it. “I say, Pauline, I wish you would give it me, like a darling. I will keep it and when I am an old fellow, I will swear to my grandchildren that it did not half do me justice.”

As if Pauline could refuse anything he asked her! (when Lady Chaloner was not by).

“You may have it if you care to,” she murmurs, “only you must promise not to tell anyone or show it to anyone.”

He promises with the eager facility of his youth and sex, and has only time to thrust it in his breast when Rue enters.

Half an hour later, Pauline, passing through the hall sees Lord Valentine busily writing a letter—the miniature is lying

close to his hand. A sudden jealous instinct crosses her mind that he is going to send it away. Some time afterwards she descends the staircase with a letter in her hand—the hall is empty now: Lord Valentine has gone out riding with Rue. The post-bag hangs in the hall—when Pauline puts her own letter in, there is only one other there. An irresistible impulse makes her take it out and look at it. It is directed in Lord Valentine's scrawl—legacy of that pernicious Eton system of written punishments.

Pauline trembles as, looking round to see that no one is near, she presses it with her finger and thumb. Yes, there is something thick in the middle. Then she glances at the address and turns white as she sees "Lady Chaloner" written on the envelope. She puts it back hurriedly and walks to the great stained window, through which a flood of lovely colour is pouring on the oaken floor. She trembles with grief and passion. What! this labour of love over

which she has spent so many hours, half of pleasure, half of pain, is to be sent to the woman whom she hates! Perhaps in his letter, Lord Valentine has told the history of it. Pauline's heart is tormented within her; the idea of Lady Chaloner possessing her treasured picture half maddens her.

Suddenly a thought comes to her—a thought that makes her shrink away as if from herself; then for some ten minutes she stands motionless. Presently she moves—like some guilty creature looking fearfully to right and left of her, she returns to the post-bag, takes out Lord Valentine's letter and thrusts it in her pocket. Swiftly she ascends the stairs to her room, and ringing the bell, asks for hot water. When it is brought, she locks the door—her knees knock together, never in her life has she committed a shameful action; she trembles and shudders at the thought of the baseness that she contemplates, for she has remembered Lady Chaloner's story of opening the

letters ; she is going to open this and abstract the picture. She will not read one line of the letter—nay, when the gum of the envelope has yielded, she shuts her eyes as she takes out the enclosure and lets the miniature fall on the ground. Yes, her instinct had been correct ; it *is* the portrait that he is sending to that hated woman. She returns the letter without a glance, and then presses to the envelope.

Just then the chiming-clock strikes six—it wants a quarter of an hour to post-time. She waits a minute or two to let it dry, and then runs downstairs with it and puts it in the bag. As she turns she is confronted by Lord Valentine. Her terror is so great that she gives a little cry and nearly falls.

“Oh !” he says in a tone of withering contempt, “it is you then who are the thief.”

She looks at him with the transfixed, agonised gaze of a trapped wild creature.

“You are a nice companion for my cousins,” he continues, his eyes lighted with fierce anger; “my aunt ought to know what a treasure she has in her house.”

For of course the young man takes it for granted that Pauline has read the letter, and, having a lively recollection himself of its contents, is fully aware of the awkwardness of a third person being also in possession of them.

Then Pauline turns upon him as a weak creature at bay will sometimes turn.

“You may tell Lady Valentine if you please,” she says with flashing eyes, “I am quite ready to leave the house this instant; I have only done what I had a right to do—I have only taken what was my own. I guessed that you were sending *her* your picture—my picture that you promised not to show anyone, and I saw your letter in the bag when I put my own there and felt the picture in it. I have taken it out; I have not looked at a line or a word of your letter.”

“And you expect me to believe that!” he says incredulously.

“I swear it!” she cries vehemently—“I will swear it on the Bible. There!” she cries, running to the table on which the Bible lies that is used every day for prayers, and laying her hand on it, “I swear I never saw one word that was in your letter.”

Lord Valentine believes her, but he is intensely disgusted. He hates everything that is not honest and straightforward.

“If you had come to me and taxed me with it, I should have told the truth and you could have had it back. I am exceedingly sorry,” (bitterly), “that I ever saw it—more than sorry that you did me the honour to paint it. I gave you credit for being clever,” (with sarcasm), “but I did not know that your cleverness extended to the art of manipulating other people’s letters.”

“I should never have known how,” cried

Pauline breathlessly, "only that Lady Chaloner herself told us how to do it."

"Really?" says Lord Valentine and his tone is a deliberate insult, for it expresses the firm conviction that the statement is a lie.

"Ask Rue, ask Barbara, if she did not."

"Shall I also tell them why I want to know?" he says with his angry eyes still fixed on the pale little face.

And at this cruel gaze, and these cruel words from the man who has been the object of her profound adoration, Pauline breaks into an agony of tears. Mercifully no one else appears upon the scene.

"There," says Lord Valentine coldly, "we will say no more about it. You had better go to your room—some one will be coming to fetch the letters directly. You need not be afraid. I shall not say anything about the matter." And with that he goes, and Pauline crawls away to her room in an agony of remorse and wretchedness.



But whilst he remains at the Court Lord Valentine never speaks to her again, except such words as bare civility makes necessary—never asks her to sing—never thrills her soul with those harrowing glances that were at once her rapture and her torment. He looks upon her as a treacherous little viper, who would be dangerous if she could. And so the poor child's romance dies away—fortunately, perhaps, for her—because she has not one stick of fuel wherewith to feed it. He despises her—she despises herself. But she will keep the picture of that beautiful face, and worship it as though it were some mythical creature whom once she saw and loved in dream-land.

CHAPTER VII.

BY MERCURY'S STATUE.

LORD VALENTINE had been rather put out during his ride with Rue, which may perhaps account for his extreme harshness to Pauline. He was not naturally given to be hard upon anything that wore a petticoat, especially if the wearer was at all pretty or taking. He had determined to express his opinion to Rue with all the freedom of authority on the subject of her flirtation with Sir Everard, and had selected the occasion of their ride as a fitting opportunity. But he no sooner opened the subject than Rue, with a little blush, interrupted him, saying rather sadly, but with unwonted firmness,

“Please, Val, not to say anything about it—it is a subject that I do not care to discuss.” And on Lord Valentine rejoining, with some temper, that he did care to discuss it, and intended doing so, Rue relapsed into absolute silence. As it is impossible to have a one-handed duel, quarrel, or argument, the young man was worsted, and his temper got very much ruffled indeed. He said some really unkind and uncomplimentary things to his betrothed, and she thought sadly of Sir Everard, and made a bitter contrast in her heart between her lover and her intended husband.

As they neared home, Lord Valentine be-thought himself of something he had wished to say to Lady Chaloner, but had omitted, and immediately on his return went to the bag to take his letter out. To his surprise it was not there. He knew himself to be careless, but surely, surely he could never have left it about. He went into the morning-room—it was not there; then he went

to his bed-room, and looked in the pocket of the coat he had taken off, with no better success. He returned to the hall, and saw Pauline in the act of slipping his letter back into the bag, and we know what happened then.

The following afternoon he went up to town. He was to dine and go to the play with Lady Chaloner, but he did not think it necessary to inform any of the party at the Court what the *business* was that necessitated his presence in London. He proposed to return again the next day.

On the Thursday morning, that is to say by return of post, Rue received Sir Everard's answer. It was a thick letter, and Rue broke the seal and opened it with all the reverent and loving care that a girl bestows upon her first love-letter. For this was her very first; Valentine's letters coming by no means under the category.

This is how it began.

“MY OWN DARLING,

(“For in spite of your cousin and all the world besides, I am resolved that you shall be mine now that I know from your own sweet lips that you do care for me), I received your dear letter, and was at first much distressed by its contents. But after thinking the matter over seriously my mind became reassured. After all, the main point is satisfactory. You are free, absolutely free and unfettered except by your father's wish, and surely if he were alive now, if he loved you, he would not for a moment wish to force you into a marriage that is repugnant to you. It is monstrous to think of tying you to a man who is quite unable to appreciate you and who evidently looks upon you only as the means of attaining certain other things that seem desirable in his eyes. The very fact of his being unable to value so precious a treasure, shows how utterly unworthy he is of you. I cannot, will not

give you up to him knowing that it could not in any way be for your good. If he treats you in the rough, brutal way now that I had one or two specimens of during my visit, and which literally set my blood on fire, what would he do when you were entirely in his power?

“ My darling, be firm—do not from a Quixotic idea of duty wreck both our lives —think how I love you—think how divinely happy we may be together, and do not let yourself be deterred by a few difficulties that will soon disappear if we are both determined to show a bold front to them. Your mother, I am sure, is too kind and gentle to exercise any tyranny over you, and your cousin, if he is a gentleman, (which I have no reason to doubt), will hardly insist upon marrying you if he knows that the idea is repugnant to you. I wish with all my heart that your father had left the Valentine property away from you in the event of your not marrying your cousin,

but perhaps we may be able to arrange something that will help to compensate him for his disappointment. Happily my own means and position are such as to put me beyond any suspicion of interested motives."

After this there followed some very glowing expressions of love that shall be left to the reader's imagination—to Rue, however, tyro as she was, it seemed the most beautiful and touching letter ever penned by mortal man. But, poor little maid, she was still bent on her sacrifice—all Sir Everard's entreaties did not make her flinch from her determination to marry Lord Valentine rather than inflict so cruel a blow upon his hopes.

All day long she went about heavy-hearted, yet trying to smile, and with that dear letter pressed against her heart. Late in the afternoon she wandered away by herself to a remote part of the gardens, and seating herself on a bench that stood at the foot of a winged-headed Mercury, gave her-

self over to meditation. Meditation not “fancy free,” alas!

She read her precious letter again and again; kissed it reverently, tenderly, adoringly; then, overcome by her emotions, she laid it down on the seat beside her, and cried as if her poor little heart would break.

It is a great mistake to surprise people—sometimes it ends in a surprise for the surpriser, not always an agreeable one. Thus it befel Lord Valentine.

He had spent a very pleasant time in London. The dinner and play with Lady Chaloner had been charming. On quitting her, he had betaken himself to the rooms of a friend where card-playing was going on. He is not at all addicted to gambling, but to-night, being in triumphant high spirits, he plays—plays and wins a hundred pounds. Proverbs are often wrong. What is that stupid old proverb, “Lucky at cards, unlucky in love”? Pooh!

Next morning, Lord Valentine, waking in high good-humour, bethinks him that he will invest his winnings in a ring for Rue. It is time that all the world should know definitely that she is his property. So he pays a visit to London and Ryder's, selects a brilliant half-hoop, and with his offering in his pocket, returns in excellent spirits to the Court.

“Rue ! Rue !” he shouts about the house, but Rue is not forthcoming. Then, having ascertained that she was last seen in the garden, he betakes himself to search for her. After some time, he sees in the distance the edge of a white dress peeping out by the side of Mercury's statue. Then that delightful instinct which possesses the young and the light-hearted that it will be fun to frighten somebody, seizes him, and animated by this pleasing intention, he creeps softly on tiptoe to the back of the figure. But what is this ?—she is sobbing ! As he peeps over the bench, he sees an open letter lying

on it—a letter in a particularly clear, bold hand that he who runs may read. And he who stands still has an even better opportunity, for with a feeling akin to suffocation, Lord Valentine sees most distinctly the audacious words, “ My own darling !”

He makes a furious snatch at it, and Rue with a little shriek of terror and surprise starts up.

“ Give it to me !—how dare you !” and she makes a frantic effort to recover her treasure. But her opponent is strong and masterful, and her attempts are futile. Then she descends to entreaty.

“ Val ! dear Val ! I implore you to give it back to me !”

Equally unsuccessful is her pleading.

“ I intend to read it,” he replies with concentrated anger. “ You are my affianced wife, and I have as much a right to see it as though you were married to me.”

“ You have not !” the girl answers. “ You have no right at all. If you do, it will

be a cowardly and dishonourable action."

"Then," he retorts, "I will commit that cowardly and dishonourable action."

"For your own sake, I ask you not to read it," pleads Rue making a last effort.

Now if Lord Valentine had been guided by a little common sense, he would have returned the letter to its lawful owner, and listened to her explanation, but having a high spirit and a hot temper, he was not given to counting the cost of gratifying them until after he had done it.

Poor Rue throws herself despairingly back on the bench and covers her face with her hands, whilst the young man proceeds with his reading. Having a knowledge of some of its contents, we may imagine what pleasant reading it was for this proud young gentleman, particularly the portion that referred to himself.

The silence is so long that Rue, terrified, looks up at last. Lord Valentine is in the act of refolding the letter,

apparently with calmness but his whole face is convulsed with passion.

“Lady Ruth Ormond,” he says in a voice that he in vain endeavours to control, “I have the honour to release you from your engagement to me and to wish you good-bye.”

“Oh, Val!” cries the girl springing up and running to him, “do not talk like that! I am going to marry you—I have never intended to do anything else.”

“Do you think,” he cries, shaking off her hand as though its touch were pollution, “that I would marry you after that if you went on your knees to me? I would as soon—” but here fortunately his manhood checks him and he does not put the terrible finish to his sentence that he had intended. “Whether,” he continues after a moment’s pause, “the—gentleman—who is so determined that you shall be his will be able to carry out his resolve remains to be seen, for,” (with intense passion), “by God! be-

fore many hours have passed, one of us shall bite the dust."

Rue is trembling in every limb when, at this juncture, Jack appears on the scene. At a glance, he conjectures that Valentine knows, if not the whole truth, the greater part of it. He goes to Rue's side and she clings to his arm.

"I am glad you have come," exclaims Lord Valentine passionately. "You can be witness that I relinquish all claim upon this faithless, perjured woman, and that I have done with her for ever."

"Oh, Jack!" sobs Rue, "it was not my fault. He stole my letter and read it."

Jack feels utterly helpless between the two—he is fond of both—he wants to mediate.

"Come, Val!" he says, "you are using rather strong language."

"Strong language!" echoes Valentine. "Upon my soul if I have not cause, I should like to know who has. The woman

I am engaged to marry is carrying on a clandestine correspondence with an infernal, impudent blackguard who addresses her 'My own darling,' and I am to take it as if it was all right and I liked it, I suppose!"

Jack is rather staggered by this revelation. He looks at Rue but she is guiltily hanging her head.

Then Lord Valentine, still under the influence of violent anger, crushes her precious letter in his hand, flings it at her feet and stalks off like a lion.

"Go after him," entreats Rue, "and oh, Jack!" (in an agonised voice), "don't let them fight."

Jack cannot repress a smile. Duelling in these days, except between French journalists, is rather an exploded and ridiculous affair.

But, all the same, he follows his nephew who is now tearing towards the house at such a pace that it almost wants seven-leagued boots to catch him. Just as Colonel

Ormond comes up with him, Lady Valentine issues from the house. Seeing the anger in her nephew's face and the trouble in Jack's, she is seriously alarmed.

"What is the matter?" she asks apprehensively.

"If you will come into the library for a moment, I will tell you," replies Lord Valentine in a smothered voice. And when they reach that apartment and the door is shut, he says with forced calmness,

"I have just taken my leave of Ruth and I can now say good-bye to you."

Ruth! in the memory of man, no one had ever heard him call her by her full name. Something very serious must have happened.

"My dear boy, do explain yourself—what does it all mean!" cries the Countess nervously.

"It means that Ruth is corresponding clandestinely with Deloraine who addresses her as his own darling—that they have

arranged for sending me to Coventry between them, and that I am going to have my reckoning with him first and then they may do what they please."

Lady Valentine is stupefied. Rue guilty of such treachery, such unmaidenly conduct! She feels very angry with her. Then with a sudden revulsion of feeling, she blames her nephew for having brought this trouble upon his own head by inviting Sir Everard to the house.

"Why did you ask him here?" she exclaims on the impulse of the moment. "I told you it was most unwise."

"How could I imagine that she would behave like this?" he answers hotly. "Do you suppose I should ever have thought of marrying a woman whom I could not trust for a couple of days with another man?"

All this is mighty fine, thinks Jack, but what about the young gentleman's own behaviour with Lady Chaloner?

“The fact is, my dear boy,” he interposes, “that you have yourself to thank in a great measure. You know you have never paid Rue any of those attentions that a girl has a right to expect from the man she is going to marry—never seemed to care for her society—indeed, you have devoted yourself to anyone rather than to her.”

“That is quite true; I warned you of it,” echoes Lady Valentine who, amiable as she is, cannot refrain from that feminine shaft, “I told you so.”

Lord Valentine throws up his head proudly.

“Whether I was to blame or no, it is all over now,” he says; “I have only to wish you good-bye.”

“But where are you going?”

“I don’t know, I don’t care—to the devil—anywhere!” And as the bitter thought crosses the young fellow’s heart that he is leaving for ever the spot of earth that is

dearest to him, he throws himself into a chair, and leaning his elbows on the table, buries his face in his hands.

“My dear boy,” cries Lady Valentine going up to him with tears in her eyes and laying a kind hand on his shoulder, “do not talk like this! I have no doubt all can be explained and arranged. Pray do nothing suddenly—do not let this get known. At all events, stay to-night and let us talk matters over calmly; you need not see Rue. And you must not be too hard upon her; remember that you have had your own flirtations: it is only natural she should think she has a right to amuse herself too.”

“Amuse herself!” echoes the young fellow lifting a face stormy with grief and anger to hers. “By Heaven! Aunt, you talk coolly; you seem to forget where that sort of amusement lands a woman who marries one man and loves another. Love—faugh!” with a gesture of disgust, “a man she has scarcely seen more than three days—no,

certainly I am well out of such a wife as that."

"Do not forget that you are speaking of my daughter," says Lady Valentine with dignity.

"Forgive me, Auntie!" he exclaims reaching out his hand to her. "You must make allowance for my being very hard hit. All my hopes and prospects gone at one stroke!" And there is something very like tears in his eyes.

Lady Valentine begins to cry and Jack looks out of the window, but for some reason or other sees little of the view. No doubt it is hard on the lad, though he has only himself to thank for it.

I am afraid I have not by any means shown you the best side of Lord Valentine, who is really a fine, high-spirited young fellow, and that you will not feel at all sorry for him. Certainly, as far as Rue is concerned, he does not deserve a great deal of sympathy.

“ Well,” he says after a moment, “ I think I will be off; there is a train from —— at nine-thirty, and I will have some dinner at the inn. Will you ring and order a trap for me, Auntie, whilst I go and say good-bye to Bab—she’d think it unkind if I left without.”

“ Oh! my dear, don’t go to-night!” entreats Lady Valentine. “ Wait until I have seen Rue, and heard what she says!”

“ No use,” (shaking his head). “ I should be a cur if, after having had such a very decided explanation of her feelings for me, I stayed on with any hope of her. No, best go—the sooner the better.”

“ Val,” says his Aunt anxiously, “ what did you mean about having a reckoning with Sir Everard? You were not serious, surely. You will not try to pick a quarrel with him.”

“ But indeed I will!” answers the young man fiercely. “ He shall answer to me for his dastardly conduct. What right had he

to talk of love to Rue, knowing that she was my affianced wife? However," (going to the door), "it is only waste of time bragging. I will go and find Bab now."

Lady Valentine turns to Jack in great distress.

"Oh! Jack, what is to be done? Do you think he means it?"

"I think he means it now," answers Jack; "but when he has cooled down a little, I am in hopes that I shall be able to make him listen to reason."

"You will go with him, then?"

"Of course I shall. I do not think he is quite to be trusted alone just at present. I will order the dog-cart, shall I, Ruth? You can send our things on to-morrow, or rather Val's, for I had better come back, as I may be able to be of some use to you. I will just tell my servant to pack some things, and he can stop here."

"Yes—do pray come back!" entreats Lady Valentine, "and perhaps you may

persuade him to return with you. I cannot bring my mind to believe that all is over between him and Rue. How could she behave so wickedly, so deceitfully? As for that horrid Sir Everard, I hate the very sound of his name!"

Jack thinks the less said the better.

"Don't be hard on her, poor little girl!" he says as he leaves the room. "I am afraid she is having rather a rough time of it just now."

"I will never consent to her marrying that man," exclaims Lady Valentine—"never."

But Jack knows that a woman's never is not nearly so formidable as a man's, though there have been instances known of a man consenting to commute eternity into time.

Meanwhile, Lord Valentine, with a heavy heart, is taking his farewell of Barbara. He has briefly told her what has befallen, and she is in floods of tears and sobs, alternately

bewailing herself and him ; reproaching Rue and launching the bitterest invectives against Sir Everard.

“I shall always detest and loathe him,” she sobs. “I will never say a civil word to him. If I can do him any harm I will. Rue shall never have him if I can prevent it !”

Lord Valentine is holding the poor little quivering form against his strong young heart—he is quite moved at the sight of her suffering. He kisses the soft fair hair.

“Good-bye, little Bab,” he says tenderly. “You won’t forget me, I know.”

“Oh ! what shall I do without you ?” she cries clinging to him and breaking into fresh sobs. “My own dear, kind, good, handsome Val ! How can Rue be so wicked, so perverted as to like that dark, ugly beast ? Oh ! darling Val, why was not I beautiful, and rich, and strong ? Would not I have been glad to give you everything—everything in the world !”

And, in her anguish, the poor little girl secret escapes her unawares. Tears spring to the young fellow's eyes—he strains her to his heart with a feeling of that tenderest pity that is akin to love.

"God bless you, my poor little darling!" he says in a broken voice. "I know you would."

"You will write to me, won't you?" she pleads.

"Ay, that I will, often," he answers stoutly. "Now, little Bab, there is no more time. I must go."

Then he kisses her hair and cheeks and eyes fondly, and she puts her arms round his neck, and lifts her lips to his face. He kisses the little quivering mouth for the first time in his life, and on that kiss the poor child feeds her romantic love for all time to come. Then he goes.

There is another leave-taking in store for him. In the passage, Pauline is waiting. She had been with Barbara when he came

to bid her farewell, and with an instinct that she was not wanted, had left the room. She surmised that something had happened between him and Rue. She knew she could never be anything to him ; that he would never think of her, but oh ! she did want him to say "Good-bye" to her kindly ; not to cherish any hard thoughts of her. He would have passed her, but she stopped him.

"Will you not say 'Good-bye' to me too ?" she asks tremulously whilst great tears gather in her eyes. "Oh, please forgive me for what I did ! I swear to you I never did such a thing in my life before." And, stretching out a little packet, she adds breaking into a sob—"Do please take this ! You may give it to *her* if you like, or to any one you please, only do, *do* say you don't think very badly of me !"

The young man is touched. He looks at her with kind, friendly eyes.

"I quite believe you, my dear little girl,"

he says, " and I don't think at all badly of you—only don't ever be tempted to do anything again that isn't quite straightforward. It was a great shame of me to think of giving it away, but of course I never dreammed you would know about it. I will take it now," (smiling), " and keep it, I promise you on my word of honour. Good-bye !" and he raises her cold little hand to his lips, kisses it, and with a kind, friendly smile passes on. Then Pauline hurries away to have a good cry all to herself, and Lady Valentine sheds bitter tears as she bids her handsome nephew farewell, so that Lord Valentine leaves the Court by no means unregretted.

Colonel Ormond accompanies him to London, and remains with him until it is broad daylight talking over the melancholy state of affairs. He is determined not to leave the young fellow until he has persuaded him out of the idea of challenging Sir Everard. Jack by no means approves

of the latter's conduct, but he has sufficient experience to know that the fine edge of a man's honour not unfrequently becomes blunted when there is a woman in the case. There may be men strong enough to resist the temptation of making love to another man's wife or betrothed when they have a violent fancy for her and she evidently reciprocates—it is to be hoped there are—many. What he would do himself under similar circumstances, Jack forbears to surmise—he knows what a man ought to do, and hopes he would have strength to do it. To resist a passion is to fight with an adversary stronger and better equipped than oneself: the safest and the most courageous thing in this instance is to fly.

“ My dear fellow,” says Colonel Ormond to his nephew, “ I don't see what is to be gained by fighting Deloraine. I imagine he is just the man to gratify your whim if you insist on provoking him, but *cui bono?* ”

“ As you are a gentleman and a soldier,

I should think you need hardly ask the question," replies Lord Valentine superbly.

"As a rule," proceeds Jack, "men do not get killed in a duel, but they do sometimes. Now suppose you got killed, Valentine?"

"You don't think I am afraid, do you?" asks the young fellow with flashing eyes.

"No, most certainly I do not," answers the other with an approving smile. "Suppose, however, that you were killed, how do you think we should all feel?"

"It would be a good thing for you. You would get the title."

"I don't care to get it in that way," smiles Jack. "And how do you suppose the world would feel at the Court? Rue would never hold up her head again."

"And serve her right!" retorts Valentine bitterly.

"On the other hand, if you killed Elizabeth, you could never face your cousin again."

"I never wish or intend to, I assure you."

Jack proceeds, without noticing the interruptions—

"And suppose you both came out of it without a scratch, do you think it wise or manly to drag the name you think so highly of through the dirt? In these days, when everything is blazoned to the world by these d——d papers, and facts are twisted into every conceivable distortion, are you willing to have Rue the talk of the town, and made the subject of all sorts of comments and innuendoes?"

"Would you have me sit still and submit tamely?" cries Lord Valentine.

"Upon my honour I don't see what else there is for it. You can't compel Rue not to care for him or to love you by all the fighting in the world. Now this is what I recommend—go off to-morrow for a cruise or abroad—be away for some months—by

that time Rue's fancy for Deloraine n have passed off—a thousand things n happen; you may come back and find ready and willing to marry you, or you v have got over the mortification of los her."

"Women are as false as ——" says Lord Valentine, making use of some very bad language. "I wish to God there were none

This is, to say the least, ungrateful in a young gentleman who has derived so much pleasure and amusement from the sex.

There is a very great deal more talk between the two men, and, finally, Jack succeeds in dissuading his nephew from the idea of challenging Sir Everard. He accompanies him to Cowes the next day. A week later sees Lord Valentine fairly out in British waters. On board the yacht he gets a humble little note from Rue.

"MY DEAR VAL,

"*Do* come back to us. We &

all so unhappy. I am miserable. I am quite ready to keep my promise to you—I never meant to do otherwise unless you could have had Valentine without me. So do forgive me and come back.

“Your affectionate,

“RUE.”

To which Lord Valentine returns the following answer:—

“DEAR RUE,

“Pray consider all at an end between us. I congratulate myself upon having discovered your sentiments before it was too late, and you are by that means saved from marrying a man who is not only *repugnant to you*, but *utterly unworthy of you*.

“Yours truly,

“VALENTINE.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DÉSILLUSIONS OF MARRIAGE.

THE first week in August Mrs. Doria goes to Scotland on a visit to the Castle. Her heart is heavy within her, for she goes accompanied only by her maid. Colonel Dorian is off for a fortnight's cruise in a friend's yacht. Remembering her futile efforts to dissuade him from his Irish trip, Rhona has borne any remonstrance, although in her heart she is quite as much opposed to his leaving her now—even more so, for her health, which used to be robust, is extremely delicate, and she is a prey to nervous terrors and apprehensions.

In the days of their courtship, and in the early days of their marriage, it had bee

agreed that they should spend this autumn abroad ; going by the Rhine to Switzerland, and thence to the Italian lakes, finishing up, perhaps, with Florence, Rome, and Naples. The project had been agreeable to Colonel Dorian, who, at that time, thought that to travel with Rhona for a companion would be eminently delightful, and Rhona had looked forward to it with rapture, picturing to herself a continual and blissful *tête-à-tête* amidst lovely scenery and under Italian skies with the idol of her heart.

Their money embarrassments had completely put a stop to these autumn plans ; but even had such not been the case, it is extremely improbable that they would have been carried out. The days when "*filer le parfait amour*" had seemed the most delightful of all occupations to Colonel Dorian were gone and past—to travel with no particular object in view would be slow and unsatisfactory to the last degree—it was, besides, deuced expensive, and in the pres-

ent state of affairs, simply out of the question. Indeed, he said, with a melancholy air, he did not see how they were ever to be able to travel and amuse themselves, or be anything, in fact, but paupers, obliged to look at every sovereign before they spent it. No ; what change or amusement they had, they must look for to friends who had pleasant houses and good shooting.

What was there left for Rhona to say ? Her heart sank like lead within her—that lovely vista which she had once seen of sunshine and blue sky, where the birds sang all day, and the air was balmy from heaven—that vista of an imaginary future had closed up—darkness and gloom had taken its place.

In former days she had always gone home to the Castle with a light, glad heart, and pleasant anticipations. Everyone was so delighted to have her back—the boys were riotously glad always. No doubt the welcome would be as kindly and cordial this

time—the difference would lie with her, not them. If George had been with her, she would have returned to them gay and glad of heart, but to revisit the scenes which would so forcibly remind her of him, alone, and apparently neglected by him, was a bitter trial to her. She would fain have waited in London for his return from yachting, that they might go north together, but he manifested so much annoyance when she made this suggestion, that she perforce abandoned the idea.

His horses were sold, his groom discharged, the footman and housemaid dismissed, and the cook left in charge of the house. So Colonel Dorian had the satisfaction of feeling that there was not much expense going on at home, and that, for the next three months, at all events, there would be no weekly bills to harass his soul. He packed his things with pleased alacrity, kissed his wife, and bade her good-bye with sincere pleasure, and went off with a

joyful heart, and a smiling, radiant countenance, like a schoolboy going home for the holidays. We know how averse men are from hypocrisy, even from those kindly little ones that may be sometimes honestly practised in the desire to avoid giving pain.

“Why, pray,” says a man, “should you look sorry when you are pleased, or pleased when you are sorry? If your wife is a nice woman, and cares for you, she ought to be delighted to think you are going to enjoy yourself.” And no doubt she ought, even though she may be lonely, and dull, and miserable at home.

Rhona remained a few days in town after her husband’s departure, with her maid and the cook, and finally betook herself to Scotland one evening by the Limited Mail. She ought to have banished thought like a sensible woman and to have slept soundly, but instead of that, she gave the rein to her imagination which played her the disagreeable trick of drawing nothing but sad and

painful pictures for her all night long. True, it recalled to her the happiness of this time last year, in even exaggerated colours, but only to remind her that those dear times were past and would never, *never* come again.

She felt utterly weary and worn out when she arrived at her journey's end, and Archie, who came to meet her and was also possessed in a remarkable degree of the manly virtue of frankness, exclaimed,

“ Why, Rhona, you look like a ghost ! What have you been doing to yourself ? ” but he kissed her at the same time with such affectionate heartiness that it brought a little colour to her cheeks and stirred a pleasureable emotion in her lonely heart. Her cousin had brought the low phaeton with the cobs which used to be hers, and which Mr. Anderson had wished to give her on her marriage only that prudential considerations had induced her to decline the gift.

"I thought you'd like to handle the ribbons again," says Archie, but Rhona has neither inclination nor strength to hold her mettlesome cobs and begs him to be charioteer. Before they reach the lodge gates, Douglas comes flying to meet them. He jumps on the step, gives her a hug like a young bear's, and kissing her vigorously half a dozen times cries,

"How are you, dear old girl? Welcome, welcome, welcome home! What fun we'll have! I'm awfully glad Dorian hasn't come! For the next ten days we can spoon you as much as ever we like."

Rhona laughs and kisses him back. It occurs to her to wonder whether George will object now to the attentions of her young cousins. She does not think he will. Her uncle and aunt greet her with cordial kindness; they are genuinely pleased to see her. Mrs. Anderson, who is one of the old school, does not approve of a husband leaving his wife except in a case of dire necessity,

and can hardly refrain from expressing as much to Rhona. Now to hear the warmth of Rhona's defence of her lord, you might imagine that she not only thought he had a perfect right to go on this yachting expedition, but that his doing so was a matter of the greatest satisfaction to herself; and Mrs. Anderson, being extremely simple-minded, and having no comprehension of the feeling which prompts the emulators of the historical Spartan boy to smile whilst their hearts are being lacerated, accepted her niece's defence in perfect good faith, and only remarked that the present generation seemed to entertain very different notions about most matters from those in vogue in her own youth. She had married late in life, and though her sons were young was some years past fifty.

The boys, who only thought of their cousin as the Rhona who had been wont to join in all their games and exercises, could not all at once be brought to regard her as

a staid married lady, and were full of ten thousand impossible projects for her amusement and theirs until Mrs. Anderson stepped in to the rescue. They were dreadfully disappointed when Rhona protested that she must really go to her room and lie down after lunch as she was quite knocked up by her journey. Douglas and Archie agreed that marriage was a confounded nuisance, and had quite spoiled poor dear little Rhona.

The latter, having betaken herself to her room, made a great effort to control her brain and go to sleep, but all in vain. When one has allowed oneself to acquire the bad habit of thinking, especially of thinking disagreeable thoughts, it is an extremely difficult one to conquer, and generally refuses to be shaken off by the person who has contracted it. Rhona found it impossible to compose herself: a thousand thoughts of last year came crowding to her brain and made bitter, painful contrasts with to-day.

This time last year, George was her ardent adorer—every day brought her long letters full of expressions of love and longing to be with her. The time was so long ; the days so dull—nothing amused him when absent from her ; nothing gave him pleasure but her letters and the thought of seeing her. He counted the hours until he should be by her side. All these dear letters were still in her desk—she had read them over one evening not long ago when he was dining out, but the effect they had on her was to make her shed bitter tears.

Last year how intensely happy had been the months they spent here together ! what delightful anticipations they had indulged in about the future ! all life was going to be one long romance. He had told her she was a woman of whom no man could tire—he had marvelled at his own good fortune in winning such a treasure—he had flattered her with the hearty flattery which runs off so glibly from the tongue of the enamoured

lover, and which yet has the hall-mark of sincerity. Now she wonders sadly to herself if it is her own fault that she has been unable to retain the devotion that he swore, and she believed would be eternal. She longs to compare her experiences with those of other women—to know if their husbands have made the same vows and fallen as lamentably short of them, and if their hearts have been wrung as hers has. She calls to mind young and pretty women amongst her acquaintances whose husbands show them very little attention, but who yet seem perfectly cheerful and good-humoured—can take pleasure in the society of other men, and can even rally their husband with an excellent grace about some fair one whom he admires. But to Rhona, a love which does not centre itself solely, entirely, grossingly upon the one object is as valueless as it is incomprehensible.

After a day or two at the Castle, her spirits begin to revive—the hearty affection

which is showered upon her acts as a tonic to her heart and nerves. Archie and Douglas are more devoted than ever.

“What would the Colonel say!” smiles Mr. Anderson one evening as he looks at the little group. Rhona is in the centre sitting on a low couch—one of the boys has an arm round her neck, the other round her waist, and each has possession of a hand. It is good to be loved—it puts us on good terms with ourselves—it is indeed a sad and humiliating thought when we imagine that no one cares for us.

There is to be no party for the twelfth this year, Mr. Anderson’s health being in so critical a state—the only guest beside Rhona and her husband is to be Colonel Ormond. Mr. Anderson, thinking that the boys were too young to be much company for Colonel Dorian, had asked him to invite some friend, and he had chosen Jack. The latter had accepted gladly: had indeed put off another engagement to accept. At Valentine Court,

Rhona had said to him that she feared he would find it rather dull and stupid at the Castle since there was to be no party ; but he had only smiled and said he was not afraid of that.

It was arranged that he and George should meet in London the night of the tenth, dine and travel down together. On the morning of the tenth, however, Rhona received the following communication from her husband :—

“ MY DEAREST RHONA,

“ I had looked forward to being with you on the morning of the 11th, but I have just had an invitation to run over in B——’s yacht to Deauville and Trouville. There is a most cheery party going and it would be a thousand pities to miss it. I have telegraphed Ormond to go down without me on the 10th, and I hope to follow on the 15th or 16th. Make it all right for

me with your people, and with best love
believe me, dearest,

“ Your affectionate husband,
“ GEORGE DORIAN.

“ P.S.—I hope you are flourishing. I
suppose you are delighted to be back at the
Castle.”

Will it seem unreasonable to the reader if I say that this letter caused Rhona the most profound grief, anger and mortification? To the masculine reader I have no doubt it will. Such however was the case. Fortunately she received it in her room, or it is certain that her expressive face would have betrayed her as she read it. But half an hour later, though her heart was full of bitter resentment, she was making her husband's excuses in the prettiest way in the world to her uncle and cousins.

“ I hope he doesn't put himself out of
the way to suit other people's convenience,”

says outspoken Douglas with indignant satire.

“Rather cool, I must say!” echoes Archie.

Mr. Anderson looks wistfully at his niece for a moment, and then says quietly,

“If Rhona does not find fault with him, I do not think we need say anything,” and that little speech gives her far more pain than anything the boys can say.

“Dorian’s a regular beast,” remarks Douglas to Archie when they are alone. “I think he is neglecting our darling little Rhona shamefully.”

“If he doesn’t behave well to her when he does come, I shall show him pretty plainly what I think of him,” says Archie significantly.

“So shall I,” rejoins Douglas.

The next day Colonel Ormond arrives, and soon wins golden opinions from everyone. The boys are delighted with him, and Mrs. Anderson, who has been considerably

exercised in her mind as to how he is to be entertained in Colonel Dorian's absence, speedily becomes reassured when she finds how frankly and pleasantly he makes himself at home. To Rhona he seems quite like an old friend, and there is no mistaking the pleasure with which he greets her. He meets her apologies for her husband more than half way. "The most natural thing in the world—quite right of Gustav not to throw away the chance of a pleasant week." Still I doubt very much whether under the circumstances he would have acted in the same way.

"I wish," whispers Douglas to her that evening as he sits beside her on the sofa, "I wish that Colonel Ormond was our cousin-in-law, instead of your Colonel," and Rhona, for a wonder, reproves him with considerable sharpness for his thoughtless remark. This twelfth is an inexpressibly melancholy one to her—she remembers the last so vividly—how rose-coloured everything had

appeared to her then—how happy she had been. But what is sadder than the anniversary of glad days when the circumstances that made them pleasant exist no more. That is why, to many hearts, Christmas Day is the most grievous one in the whole calendar.

There are only four to go shooting this year. Colonel Dorian being absent, there would have been but three, but Archie telegraphed for a friend who arrived overnight. The day is cool and fair—the party return in high spirits with a famous bag. Jack is a crack shot, and has distinguished himself immensely. Though Rhona congratulates him in the prettiest, kindliest manner, she can scarcely keep back the tears that the remembrance of her husband's absence brings to her eyes. The dinner is a cheery one—Jack's health is drunk, and Rhona joins cordially in the toast, but she is thinking how this time last year she drank it with a heart brimming over with

pride and joy, and her hand clasped in her love's.

There is no shooting the next day, and she takes Colonel Ormond to the glen and the lower gardens, and they loiter about together all the pleasant sunshiny afternoon, and Jack tells her the story of Lord Valentine's disappointment.

"I thought it would come to that," says Rhona. "I am very, very sorry for him. Still one can hardly be surprised at Rue not finding him all sufficient when he took so little notice of her and so much of Lady Chaloner. "I wonder," she continues, (for she entertains a slight feeling of pique against that lady), "that, knowing Lord Valentine was engaged to his cousin, she should have allowed him to pay her so much attention."

Jack smiles.

"I don't think scruples of that sort ever visit Lady Chaloner," he says. "She must have some one to adore her, and I rather

fancy that if that some one is the lover or husband of another woman, it lends zest to her appreciation."

"Do you not think," asks Rhona fixing her eyes upon him and speaking with extreme earnestness, "that it is shocking for a married woman to want the attention of any man but her husband?"

Jack hesitates. He knows so many charming married women to whom it is agreeable to pay attention—there is one not a thousand miles from him at the present moment to whom he would like nothing better than to devote himself.

"Do you not?" repeats Rhona, and there is something in her tone which seems to indicate that he has fallen slightly in her esteem on account of his hesitation.

"Well," he returns, "it depends so much upon circumstances. If a woman is very charming, and nice, and pretty, and her husband does not appreciate her, it is not altogether unnatural that men should be

tempted to admire her and to show their admiration."

"But Sir Philip is most kind and good to her."

"Oh!" says Jack with a little start—he had not been thinking about Lady Chaloner for the last minute or so. "You see," he proceeds hastily, "society has undergone a considerable change of late years; there is no doubt that married women enjoy a freedom now-a-days that would have completely horrified our mothers."

"It is a great pity," says Rhona, "and can only lead to unhappiness. What is the use of a man and woman choosing each other from all the rest of the world if they do not mean always to love and to remain faithful to each other?"

"Ah!" replies Jack, "what a Paradise the world would be if that were actually the case—that is," (smiling), "for the married people; we poor bachelors should die of envy."

"No—you would get married," answers Rhona with a bright smile. "But tell me, now that the engagement between your nephew and niece, (I am always amused when I think of your being their uncle), is over, is Rue going to marry Sir Everard?"

"I do not know. Poor little girl! she is dreadfully distressed about the affair; divided between liking Deloraine, and not wanting to keep Valentine out of the property. She wrote to Val and told him she was willing to marry him, but he will have nothing to say to her. She refuses to see Deloraine, who is dreadfully cut up, and she is fretting so that I am afraid we shall all have to go on our knees and beg her to have him, or she will waste away to nothing."

"It was very sudden, was it not, her liking for Sir Everard?"

"Yes; but love at first sight is by no means an uncommon occurrence. I remember," (smiling), "a gentleman in whom you

are interested, telling me that he fell in love with a certain charming young lady the first moment he saw her, and that he then and there resolved she should be his."

A little blush of pleasure suffuses Rhona's face—she smiles at Jack, and he is rewarded for obeying the honest impulse of his heart.

"I have known," he continues, "many cases of love at first sight. The strangest one was where two people fell violently in love with each other without having exchanged a word—the lady being seated on a balcony, and the man on the railing of a garden on the other side of the road."

"How extraordinary! And did they marry each other?"

"Well, no," answers Jack; "they became extremely attached to each other, but there were circumstances—in fact——"

However, for some reasons best known to himself, Jack abstains from concluding his narrative.

"I cannot bear to think of Rue being in

distress," remarks Rhona. "She is so lovely, and always seemed so light-hearted. Love," (sighing), "is a dreadful thing."

"It is a mercy when one has out-grown it," smiles Jack.

"Do people out-grow it?" asks Rhona quite seriously. "Have you out-grown it?"

"It does not do to boast," he answers lightly, "but I hope I have got over the worst form of the disease."

Here Douglas comes rushing down the glen in search of them, and deprives Jack of the pleasure he had been looking forward to, of giving Mrs. Dorian his arm up the steep ascent.

CHAPTER IX.

A LOYAL FRIEND.

WHEN Mrs. Anderson apologises to Colonel Ormond for the dulness of his visit, he replies to her that he was never happier in his life. And there is a heartiness in his tone that forbids his sincerity to be called in question. When he is not shooting, or playing billiards with the boys, he is always by Rhona's side, and there is no doubt that he is perfectly amused and contented in her society. It never occurs to any of them to make a remark, or to have any *arrière-pensée* about his devotion to her—his regard for her appears to be akin to that which the other inmates of the Castle feel for her. And in truth, Jack looks upon

her as a woman to be admired, to be tenderly beloved by any man so happy as to have the right to love her, but never for one moment to be flirted with. Rhona herself feels a trust and confidence in him that makes his society eminently delightful to her—she can talk to him as she can to no other man or woman of her acquaintance, and he always seems to understand and to sympathise with her.

It is Sunday and they have all been to morning church. Colonel Ormond is not as a rule very punctual in his religious observances—he has an idea, like a good many other men, that if he were married he would certainly go to church regularly, perhaps have family prayers and do what was right and proper in the way of setting an example; but for a bachelor and a man of the world, leading a very worldly life, to pretend to religion was, in his opinion, an irreverent farce. And Jack had a great reverence for sacred things and was never

heard to talk sceptically or to make profane jests about virtue and goodness. On this occasion, he did not find the service tedious because he was much occupied in contemplating Rhona, who sat just in front of him between her two cousins. And it is remarkable that even though a man may have little or no religion himself, it is always agreeable and admirable to him to see devotion in the woman whom he likes and admires. Jack, having intentionally placed himself in the corner of the seat behind Rhona, found considerable pleasure in watching her and reflected to himself how easy it would be to be good if one had such a wife to lead one's thoughts heavenwards.

The Scotch service he did not like—the extempore prayers; the standing where you are accustomed to sit and sitting where in our church we stand; the hymns to old-fashioned and not very musical tunes; the long-winded sermon. Still there was always the back of that pretty head to look at, and

Jack took it for a text and preached himself a long sermon about it, and though he might have been better occupied in listening to the preacher, there was nothing in his heart or thoughts to desecrate the house of prayer.

Church over, he walked home with the boys. After lunch, Douglas and Archie with their friend and the dogs went for a long walk: Mrs. Anderson retired to her sitting-room to read to her husband, and Colonel Ormond proposed to Rhona a stroll up to the moor. She acquiesced; so having thoughtfully slung a camp-stool over his arm and being artfully in hope that the steepness of the ascent would make his arm acceptable to Mrs. Dorian, Jack went to seek her in the corridor. It all happened as he wished. Rhona, who had at first laughingly declined his proffered assistance, was not sorry ultimately to accept it, and when they arrived at a respectable altitude, she gave him smiling praise for his thought-

fulness in the matter of the camp-stool. It was *such* an afternoon—*such* a view—to express all the delights of the place, scene and circumstances, Jack felt that the strongest superlatives would be necessary. Rhona sat on her stool—he, having first asked permission, reclined at her feet. She would have had him smoke, being possessed of the amiable attribute of liking to see men happy, but, for once, Jack thought bliss could be more perfect without than with a cigar. It would be profanation to taint that pure, heather-scented air, and besides—he would be obliged to sit further away from his companion and to be perpetually on the watch lest the smoke should get into her eyes or up her nose. So he declined with resolution, and Rhona was rather glad, for contrary to what her sex generally affect to think, though she found the smell of a cigar agreeable in a room, she did not like it in the open air.

It was a most beguiling afternoon, warm

but not enervating—there was a little heaven-sent breeze, just enough to fan one without giving the slightest suggestion that there might be imprudence in sitting too long—the Grampians stood out clear against a background of blue sky—the waters of lovely Lomond shone like a silver mirror in the distance—it was an afternoon for confidences—it was a Sunday afternoon. Somehow, when Jack and Rhona were together, the conversation would turn on marriage—whether he or she led up to it I know not, but so it was. And they had not been very long established in their halting-place on the hill-side before that engrossing and fertile subject suggested itself.

“I do not think,” says Rhona, “that girls are well brought-up now-a-days—by that I mean not in a way to fit them for the duties of married life. It would be much better if we were trained to understand domestic matters and to be good housekeepers like our grandmothers. I believe a man would

value and care more for a woman who made him comfortable than for one with a dozen accomplishments."

"But," says Jack, "a man wants a companion in his wife, not a housekeeper."

"If," replies Rhona, "she is tolerably intelligent, she ought to be able to be that too. After all," with a fine smile, (which I suppose is the only rendering, though an utterly inadequate one, of the expressive *fin sourire*—subtle smile, malicious smile, arch smile, meaning smile, mischievous smile—none of these is comprehensive like the French word) : "after all, men, most men, are not so appallingly clever as quite to drive a woman to despair by the sense of her own inferiority."

Jack laughs heartily.

"I could not have fancied you capable of so severe an utterance," he says.

"Was it severe?" she asks innocently.

"Horribly!" he answers still laughing.
"It was crushing!"

“ But,” continues Rhona seriously, “ does the present style of education make us companionable? If a girl sings a little, plays a little, draws a little, has a smattering of French and German; does that make her more agreeable or interesting to her husband? I was taught to do all these things, and I have never had occasion for one of them since I married, except to speak French when we were in Paris for a fortnight after our marriage, and I only did that with an awful feeling of *mauvaise honte* and very indifferently.”

“ But you sing and play delightfully,” interrupts Jack. “ And that is a great charm.”

“ It is to some men, perhaps, but my husband does not care for music; in fact rather dislikes it than not. At home I do not open the piano from one month’s end to the other.”

“ What a shame!” says Jack. “ Now, if you were my wife, I should like nothing so

much as to sit at home in my arm-chair of an evening and hear you sing."

"And if I were your wife," laughs Rhona, "I should be very happy to gratify you. I am very fond of singing to anyone who cares to hear me."

"No doubt," remarks Jack, "if I ever marry, it will be a woman who hasn't the slightest idea of music. That is the perversity of Fate. Then, too, you sketch, don't you?"

"A little, but sketching is the most selfish of all accomplishments, because, if you are only a mediocre performer, you give no earthly pleasure to anyone but yourself. No! but only fancy if I had learned to cook and could make some delicious dish for my husband, how pleased he would be!"

"I should not be at all pleased," retorts Jack. "I should hate to see my wife with her delicate cheeks roasted and her pretty little fingers burned."

"Oh, no, you would not!" returns Rhona

with an air of superior wisdom. " You wouldn't notice her cheeks or fingers, but if the dish was appetising, you would tell her she was a good clever little girl and perhaps give her a kiss."

" What a horrid, selfish set of beasts you seem to think us!" says Jack with genuine concern.

" No, I don't, but I think that to keep your love we ought to understand how to make you thoroughly comfortable—we ought to be ready to burn our fingers to please you, or to have them cool and soothing to lay on your head when it ached ; they ought to be nimble enough to play the piano if you wanted music, or soft and sympathetic when you cared to press them ; we ought to indulge you with luxuries, and yet be strictly economical ; we ought to train our servants as perfect as automatons, and yet not bore you with a single domestic detail ; we ought not only to be able to add up accounts, but to make them come to a

satisfactorily small amount ; we ought to be well dressed that you may be proud to take us out, and yet pay very little to our dress-makers and milliners ; we ought——”

“Stop, pray stop ! Mrs. Dorian,” cries Jack, “I don’t like to hear a young girl talking like a woman of forty.”

“A young girl !” echoes Rhona with mock dignity.

“Well ! what are you—nineteen ?”

“I was twenty a fortnight ago.”

“Oh, I beg your pardon !” laughs Jack. “I did not think you were so old. But even for the great age of twenty, I think your views far too advanced.”

“Very well then, if they displease you, I will go back to the subject of education. You see there is no earthly reason why a girl should not learn the accomplishments that are thought necessary and understand household matters as well. Why should she be brought up as if she were to be surrounded by luxury all her days and was

sure of always having a trustworthy house-keeper at her elbow to know and manage all the details that she ought to know and manage herself? Don't girls every day marry poor men—men poor by comparison, at least, and then who is to blame when, being utterly ignorant and inexperienced, everything goes wrong?"

Jack says nothing, being well aware that silence is the surest way of inviting confidences.

"When I married," proceeds Rhona, "I knew absolutely nothing—I had not the faintest idea of housekeeping, and very little about the value of money; I knew what was right, and how things ought to look and taste—given *carte blanche*, I would have ordered a first-rate dinner, but my part would have been entirely confined to ordering. If the cook spoiled everything, I could have found fault with her, but I could not have told her how to mend matters next time. Just the same with my

unlucky furniture ; it was very easy to go to a shop and order what pleased my fancy, but I had not the smallest notion as to what things ought to cost or what we could afford. That has been the cause of all my unhappiness," and here tears start to Rhona's eyes.

Jack looks away down the valley to where the steel-coloured river wanders by the quaint old many-windowed cloth-mill. It is horrid for a man to see tears in the eyes of a woman he admires when they have been brought there by the cruelty of another man ; it is an aggravation, too, when that man happens to be your friend and you cannot denounce him as a brute and a scoundrel.

" But Dorian ought to have explained to you," he begins.

" He did," interrupts Rhona rushing to the defence of her beloved one. " It was all my fault—well, perhaps not my fault exactly, but my stupidity. He was con-

stantly telling me before I married him that he was comparatively poor, and that I should not be able to live in the way I had been accustomed to, and I thought that by taking a small house, and only having a few servants, and everything in a very quiet and humble way, as it seemed to me, that we were most economical, but it appears that all the time I was in reality dreadfully extravagant, and ruining poor George."

"I don't exactly see how you can have been doing that," breaks in Colonel Ormond. "I suppose you didn't go about giving extensive orders in jewellery or that sort of thing."

Rhona smiles.

"What an idea! No; but furnishing is so expensive, and I wanted to have my house pretty, and George was very kind about it; but when the bills came in, they were hundreds of pounds more than we expected, and he could not pay them. Now I had not been brought up to think it dread-

ful to keep tradesmen waiting for their money a year or so, but George, you know, is so very punctilious in his notions of honour. And he is quite right, of course: now I can see it. Well, it worried him so dreadfully that he got very angry with me, and said things that I thought were unfair and unjust. I don't suppose," and Rhona looks away at the distant purple of the moors, which she scarcely sees through the mist of her tears, "I don't suppose we should ever have had a word if it had not been for those odious bills. Rather than vex him, I would have lived in a house furnished with deal and chintz, but it was too late when the things were ordered and in the house. Then I began housekeeping in an extravagant manner, though I thought it impossible to have less than we did; so matters got worse, and George was nearly driven out of his mind with worry. Then he began to abuse marriage—you have often heard him," proceeds Rhona, and now her tears

are falling fast, "and I am afraid I am not a very good temper, and I reproached him for it, and made matters worse."

What can Jack say? He longs to sympathise with her, but he knows well enough that, if his sympathy took the form of blaming her husband, she would resent it at once.

"It's an awful bore being hampered for money," he remarks. Not that he has ever been in that unpleasant predicament.

"Now," says Rhona trying to smile, "I am getting quite clever, and beginning to understand how to economise. I shouldn't wonder if I end by becoming a most awful screw."

"Bless your little heart!" thinks Jack, but he does not venture to say so.

"So now," he says, "you have got over your money troubles, and are going to be happy ever after."

"Oh, no," she answers—"we still owe five hundred pounds, and George will be

miserable until that is paid. I wanted him to let me tell my uncle, and ask him to advance it, but he was furious at the bare idea. "Pray, pray," turning eagerly to Jack, "never let him think I told you. I don't know how I came to say anything about it, but though I haven't known you very long, I feel that I may trust you. May I not?" and she holds out a friendly little hand to him.

Jack's impulse is to kiss it, but he restrains himself, and only presses it warmly. She is never, *never* to know what he feels for her—nay, he hardly knows himself. She is his ideal woman—if he had met her before she was Dorian's wife, and she had cared for him, he *knows* that he would have loved her better than he has ever loved yet—have loved her to his life's end.

But then men often think that of the woman who cannot be theirs.

Her devotion to her husband, the innocence and purity of her mind, the

absence of those little coquettices of look and manner which are sometimes indulged in even by perfectly virtuous women—all these things go to the making of her charm for him. He does not want to be her lover, he would not dare to pollute her even to his own inmost heart by one unworthy thought; but he wants eagerly, ardently to be her friend; her trusted friend—the one to whom she would go straight if the need occurred. He would like to contribute to her happiness even though in doing it he were driving her more closely to her husband's arms; further from his own. And to those who are utterly sceptical upon the subject and whom no words of mine may ever hope to convince, I will still say, let them scoff as they will, that so far from it being an immutable consequence, that a man's love for the wife of another man must be evil and wrong; it may be the purest, noblest, most self-sacrificing sentiment of his life.



“I hope,” Jack says in answer to Rhona’s little appeal. “I hope you feel quite sure that you may trust me.”

And then he thinks it as well to change the subject.

“I had a letter from my sister-in-law this morning,” he tells her. “Douglas gave it me in church with some others. It is dreadfully tantalising getting one’s letters in church.”

“Yes,” she answers smiling. “I had one from George. I wanted dreadfully to open it.”

“How is he getting on? Is he having a pleasant time?”

“He says they are a very cheery party,” replies Rhona, and her face falls, and involuntarily she heaves a sigh. “He expects to be here on Tuesday morning in time to shoot. But, tell me, what does Lady Valentine say about Rue?”

“I will read her letter to you,” answers Jack taking it from his pocket.

"I am really quite unhappy about this poor child—you know how bright and full of fun she is naturally. Since Valentine left I do not think I have seen her smile once. She sits listlessly with her hands in her lap and does not care to ride or drive her carriage or do anything. I fear her heart is entirely given to Sir Everard, but I fancy that she has a superstitious dread of going against her father's wish. She still says that she will marry Valentine, but she seems to shudder at the thought. Is it not dreadfully unfortunate that Val should have asked her here to stay? Before this, although she liked him, I am positive that she did not entertain any serious thought of Sir Everard. And now it is as though I had completely magnetised her. I have had several letters from him—very manly and straightforward ones—there is no doubt about his devotion to her. He implores me with the greatest urgency to let him see her, and I am really so nervous at the

depressed state she has fallen into that I am more than half tempted to send for him. I should like you, my dear Jack, to advise me. Of course we cannot overlook the fact that my dear husband ardently desired the marriage between Rue and Val, but you knew his kind heart and his love for his children. Surely had he been spared to us, he would never have insisted upon marrying Rue against her wish, and now that he is in that blessed region, (as I cannot doubt that he is), where human aims and ambitions must seem so small, can one not imagine that, if a blessed spirit *can* know regret, he would feel it if he were the means of bringing unhappiness upon his child!"

Jack smiles a little as he reads the last few sentences, but Rhona looks grave and earnest.

"I think Lady Valentine is quite right," she says. "But," (looking seriously into Jack's eyes), "do not things happen strange-

ly? And how is it possible to account for loves and likings? It seems to me ten times more natural that Rue should care for a handsome, gay, high-spirited young fellow like Lord Valentine, than for that serious, grave-looking Sir Everard."

"That is just it," returns Jack. "In spite of your twenty years, and the vast experience you must have acquired in them, perhaps you have not remarked that people find the greatest charm in others whose qualities are the most unlike their own. A clever man likes a frivolous woman; an intellectual woman fancies a great stupid giant; a bright, merry woman likes a grave, sober sort of man; a matter-of-fact man admires a sentimental woman, and so on, even to physical differences. A fat man likes a thin woman——"

"No, no, no!" laughs Rhona interrupting him. "All men like fat women. I don't mean revoltingly fat women, but women who are *embonpoint*."

"I am sure they don't," exclaims Jack with warmth. "At all events, I don't. But," (smiling), "I know why you say that. Gustav always had rather a weakness for big women, and you mould all other men's thoughts and ideas upon his. To return to Rue, though. She and Val are a great deal too much alike to get on really well."

"It is a thousand pities," sighs Rhona who thinks an immense deal of Lord Valentine. "I should have thought any girl might have been fond of him."

"Love has a strange delight in cross-purposes," says Jack. "I am quite sure that poor little girl who is staying at the Court is far too fond of him for her own peace of mind."

"Yes," answers Rhona. "And I thought——"

"Thought what?" asks Jack as she pauses.

"It is very stupid to begin a sentence and not to finish it," says Rhona blushing a little,

“but I would rather not say what I was going to, if you do not mind.”

“Shall I say it for you?” he asks.

Rhona looks inquiringly at him.

“You thought that poor little Bab had lost her heart to him too.”

“I—I was afraid so.”

“It had occurred to me before,” pursues Jack, “but when I saw how dreadfully distressed she was at his leaving Valentine after reading the letter, there was no doubt left in my mind.”

“Oh! what a perverse world this is!” utters Rhona with a heavy sigh.

“I am going to write to my sister-in-law to-night,” observes Colonel Ormond after a pause, “what shall I advise her?”

“I cannot give an opinion,” answers Rhona shaking her head.

“Do,” persuades Jack. “I should think a great deal of your honest opinion.”

Thus urged, Rhona looks for inspiration to the distant chain of mountains, and the

blue heaven beyond. Then, withdrawing her eyes from the horizon, and bringing them back to Jack's, she says pensively,

“And suppose she married Sir Everard, and was disappointed in him, and he in her?”

“They would only be sharing the fate of thousands who have gone before them,” he answers without any *arrière-pensée*.

Rhona blushes a burning blush, and turning sharply away, affects to be gathering a bunch of purple heather that grows beside her.

“At all events,” says Jack, “when people have married for love, they are not haunted by the thought that if they had married some one else, all their lives might have been different. They are more ready to look upon their disappointment as inevitable, and less likely to turn elsewhere for consolation.”

“It must be an awful thing to be married to one man and to love another,” says

Rhona solemnly. "For, I suppose, that strive as you might against it, when your husband was unkind or unjust to you, your thoughts would turn to the man whom you believe would always have been good and true to you."

"Though, after all, he might not have been any more than the other man," remarks Jack. "It is always an immense puzzle to me how a man who is very much in love with the woman he marries can ever turn round and be harsh and unkind to her. I never shall understand it, I suppose, until," (smiling), "I become a husband myself."

"You will understand it well enough then," says Rhona rising and setting her face homewards.

CHAPTER X.

A NEW TORTURE.

TWO days later Colonel Dorian arrives in the highest spirits and the best temper in the world. He is affectionate to Rhona, courteous to host and hostess, kind and genial with the boys, whom he takes entirely by surprise. There are no black looks now at their blandishments and endearments towards Rhona—on the contrary, he smiles benevolently upon them, and Douglas and Archie who are, like most young people, easily won over, pronounce their cousin-in-law to be “not half a bad fellow.” They regard him with considerable respect too after he has indulged them in the smoking-room with some account of

his extensive travels. Rhona has forgotten all her troubles, all her disappointments, and for a few weeks leads quite a charmed existence. There is no other woman to attract the roving glances of her lord—every man in the house is devoted to her, a circumstance which cannot fail to be delightful to a nature that has so much “love of approbation” in it as Rhona’s. It is a great stimulus to Colonel Dorian’s affection for his wife to see how much she is beloved and esteemed by others, and here it no longer seems ridiculous and contemptible to be uxorious as it does in society. Colonel Ormond stays a fortnight after his friend’s arrival, and though he is pressed and entreated to prolong his visit, he urges very important reasons for taking his departure. We know that in these cases a man’s will is very much his law, so we must conclude that Jack had some particular reason for cutting short his visit. I can safely aver that it was not because he was dull or bored

that he left. A couple of evenings before his departure, as he and Colonel Dorian were smoking their evening cigars together, Jack artfully led the conversation to the subject of bills and tradesmen, and George, being in an expansive mood, enlarged freely upon the subject and even went so far as to speak of the embarrassments from which he suffered. After the recital, Colonel Ormond, in the most natural way in the world and as though the idea had just flashed across his brain, broke out,

“Look here, Gustav! I have got five hundred pounds invested in something that I don’t care at all about. I wish to goodness you’d borrow it at five per cent.—it might be handy for you and I should feel a deuced deal more comfortable about it.”

“My dear old Jack! it’s very good of you,” begins his friend, “but——”

“Not good at all,” replies Colonel Ormond, “on the contrary, it’s making a selfish use of your necessity. It’s precious

difficult to get five per cent. safe for you money now-a-days."

Colonel Dorian ruminates.

"It *would* be perfectly safe with me," he says presently.

"Safe! I should think so," says Jack "I should very much like to have the chance of lending you five thousand on the same terms. You can have it for a year, two years, five—as long as you like."

"It would be a tremendous convenience to me to have it for a year," remarks Colonel Dorian—"I can save it in that time, I think, and if you don't mind lending it for so short a while, I shall be awfully obliged to you. It will be such a tremendous relief to get those brutes paid and done with—it has driven me nearly mad for the last six months to think of owing money I couldn't pay. I have hated to go into the very streets where their cursed shops were."

"All right. I'll let you have it in a

week's time. I will write to my man about it to-morrow."

"Thanks—a thousand thanks," says Colonel Dorian heartily.

"No thanks at all, my dear Gustav—it is quite as great a convenience to me as to you."

And if you were watching Jack's countenance narrowly, you might detect something like a gleam of triumph in his eyes. And if you possessed a nature sceptical about the motives of other people's actions, you would say to yourself, with an inward smile at your own sagacity, that Jack had an interested motive in obliging Rhona's husband. But you would never have made a greater mistake in your life, for his honest heart has but one wish—to make her life smoother and happier. And he knows that can best be done by making her husband kinder and more considerate to her, and by removing the difficulties that cause his irritation against her.

Everyone misses him when he goes—Rhona, perhaps, most of all ; but so long as she has her adored one and he smiles upon her, she can afford to miss everyone else. Colonel Dorian is radiant at the thought of being able to pay those detested bills—a week later, having heard from the kindly genius who presides over the Guards' department at Cox's that five hundred pounds have been placed to his account, George, with a light heart, is engaged in writing cheques in the library. To him enters Rhona, and coming up behind him stoops to kiss the back of his head. He looks up with a beaming smile.

“No more cursed bills on my mind, thank God !” he says heartily.

“Why, darling !” responds Rhona, “where have you got the money from ? Has some one left you a legacy ?”

“No, my child, but it happened that Jack had some money in an investment that he didn't like, so he proposed to lend it to

me at five per cent. And I think, if we make an effort, we may save it by this time next year."

Colonel Dorian has returned to his writing, and is therefore unconscious of the burning blush that overspreads Rhona's face. And though I am a novelist and therefore know what everybody thinks, I cannot take upon me to say why Rhona blushes, but I think that must be because she really does not know herself.

A week goes by—the delightful sensation of waking up a free man, unhampered by debt, is wearing off, and the weather has broken up. Colonel Dorian is beginning to feel a little bored ; the lads are very good lads, but they are not much company for him. Rhona is very sweet and good, but—but— Change is very pleasant ; sometimes a change for the worse is better than a perpetual sameness. Just at this time, however, a change for the better is offered. Colonel and Mrs. Dorian are invited to spend a fortnight at Mr.

Orme's place in Yorkshire. Mr. Orme is Nella's father-in-law; he has a fine estate and capital shooting, and Nella is to be there.

When Rhona receives the invitation, her foolish heart sinks within her; she does not feel equal to going amongst strangers herself, but she knows George will hail the invitation with delight. Her anticipation is perfectly correct; at first he endeavours to persuade her to go too, but when she makes objection he takes it as a matter of course that he shall go without her. Well! glad days cannot last for ever—pain must alternate with pleasure, (for women, at all events), but foolish Rhona would prefer her husband being thrown into the society of any woman rather than Nella's. Women do make such mistakes about other women, and so often take friend for foe and foe for friend.

Once more Colonel Dorian radiantly packs his things, (he has given up the ex-

travagance of a valet), and departs with that beaming, smiling face that makes Rhona sad, but inspires everyone else with an agreeable and sympathetic sensation. That smiling, pleasant expression is natural to him and causes young women in shops to run with alacrity to serve him, and even exercises an excellent influence on porters at railway-stations, and other individuals who serve in a menial capacity. It is a mercy to be born with a face like that, but it is a mercy that is by no means widely extended and is rarely seen amongst travellers. I don't know how it may be with other nations, not having devoted myself to the study of physiognomy in foreign countries, but travelling certainly exercises a most baneful effect on the tempers and countenances of most of my fellow-countrymen and countrywomen.

Colonel Dorian writes as usual to his wife

that he is enjoying his visit vastly ; he sends her kind little messages from Nella which, I am ashamed to say, Rhona receives with gestures of disgust and impatience. Colonel Ormond is also a guest, and Mrs. Dorian, with a pained feeling at her heart, pictures both men devoting themselves to Mrs. Orme and forgetting her. I am afraid that by so candidly revealing all her secret thoughts, I shall quite destroy the reader's interest in, and sympathy for my heroine. But the first year of married life to a very young woman who has a large imagination and has expected impossible bliss, is generally a trying time, and there are few more cruel pains than that of seeing one's dearest illusions dispel.

The fortnight passed somehow, and George once more returned safely in spite of Rhona's conviction that, because he was so unutterably dear to her, some misfortune must inevitably befall him. The end of the first week in October they were to leave the

Castle on a month's visit to Mr. and Mrs. Granville at the Manor House. After that they were to return home.

The morning of their departure arrives—Rhona goes to her uncle's room to wish him good-bye. As he affectionately kisses her, he puts an envelope into her hand.

"That is a little present for you, my dear," he says; "but do not open it until you are in the train."

"My dearest uncle," smiles Rhona, "remember my sex. I shall die of curiosity in the meantime! Let me look, and then I can thank you so much better."

"I don't like thanks," he says pulling her ear gently. "No—I cannot retract my injunction."

"Very well then, a thousand thousand thanks."

"Don't be too lavish of your gratitude," remarks Mr. Anderson smiling slyly, "it may not be worth so much, you know."

"Well, have not I ten thousand old

kindnesses to thank you for?" she answers, the ready tears starting to her eyes. "Good-bye, dear, and get well very very soon."

The boys accompany them to the station and in the excitement of leave-taking it is some time before Rhona remembers her envelope. She opens it.

"Oh!" she exclaims with a little blush of surprise and pleasure, and her husband, who is reading the paper, looks up.

She waves triumphantly before his eyes a hundred pound bank-note.

"See what Uncle Douglas has given me!" she cries.

"It is very nice to have rich relations," responds Colonel Dorian.

Then Rhona with a bright smile puts it into his hand and says,

"There, that will go towards paying some of our bills."

"You had better keep it and spend it on yourself," he returns.

"No, no, no—it shall go towards making up for some of my extravagance."

So George takes it. After all, it is only fair that she should contribute something towards paying for her expensive fancies. He kisses her; calls her a good little girl and behaves most charmingly to her for the next four and twenty hours. Rhona would like to have a great many hundred pound notes if they would always purchase so much happiness.

Rosalind Granville is looking forward with the greatest eagerness to seeing the pair whom she has mated and in whom she expects to behold a second edition of herself and Charlie. On the evening of their arrival, she goes to her room, after wishing them good night, with a feeling of something like chagrin. She can never conceal anything from her husband, and when he arrives and her maid has departed, she

pushes him into a low chair and seats herself on his knee. But she does not all at once attack the subject that is exercising her thoughts.

“What have you got in your great mind, little woman?” says Charlie smiling and softly pulling her long hair.

She pauses for a moment with a reflective air and then says,

“What do you think about it?”

“What is *it*, Rosy?”

“Why, *my* marriage.”

“*Your* marriage,” (smiling mischievously), “I should think nothing could be happier or more successful.”

“Charlie, don’t tease me. You know what I am thinking of.”

“Gustav and Rhona?”

Rosalind nods her head.

“I don’t think Rhona is looking very well.”

“Of course not,” (impatiently), “but do you think she looks happy?”

"I certainly did not remark anything to the contrary."

"I don't feel particularly pleased with Colonel Dorian," remarks Mrs. Granville with decision.

"Why not?"

"I don't think he is attentive enough to her, and I was not at all pleased at his devoting himself so much to Ella."

Ella is Charlie's sister, a widow and very pretty."

"Oh, that was Ella's fault. She must flirt; I believe she'd flirt with me if there wasn't another man present."

"Rhona did not like it—in fact I thought she looked quite distressed when he was sitting on the sofa whispering to Ella. I don't suppose he means any harm, but I do not think a married man ought to look at other women in that sort of way."

"Old Gustav always had rather a speaking countenance," observes Charlie.

"It is to be hoped," says Rosalind drily,

“that he says more with it than he means, for a stranger might have imagined by his eyes that he had fallen desperately in love with Ella.”

“He always did look at women like that,” remarks Charlie again. “I have seen him do it to scores of them.”

“It is time he left off, then, now,” replies Rosalind severely. “However, I am quite sure of one thing, and that is that Rhona is fonder than ever of him.”

“I think she is,” replies Charlie.

Then there ensues a short silence. It is broken by Rosalind saying with a suspicious tremulousness in her voice,

“Oh, Charlie ! if it did not turn out well, I should never forgive myself.”

Her husband answers her reassuringly, makes some remark about “Kismet,” and marriages being made in heaven, with one or two other little sayings that seem appropriate to the occasion, and calculated to remove any feeling of responsibility from

Rosalind's pretty shoulders. But Mrs. Granville, although comforted, does not go to bed quite happy in her mind.

Mrs. Vernon is a very pretty woman : she is, besides, a thorough coquette. Her friends say there is no harm in her. By that they probably mean that she does nothing to compromise or to injure herself, but she certainly does a good deal of harm by making other women unhappy, and by encouraging men to believe that she cares for them when she is only amusing herself, and gratifying her own vanity at their expense. With this exception, she is a very charming person : sweet-tempered, well-bred, witty. Her friends never think of inviting her to their houses without providing for her the amusement she requires, and Rosalind had bidden a dashing young Lancer to the Manor House to beguile Mrs. Vernon's time. Unfortunately, he had only been twenty-four hours in the house, when he was sum-

moned away by the sudden and severe illness of his father, and the lovely widow was left without any "men to govern in this wood." She therefore accepted and encouraged Colonel Dorian's advances with great complacency, and there is no doubt that his attentions to her were more constant and solicitous than was becoming for a man with a newly-married and devoted wife. He was always walking, riding, or sitting with her; bestowed the most unmistakeably admiring glances upon her, and, in fact, conducted himself in a manner to make Rosalind vexed and Rhona utterly miserable. Nothing so terrible as this had yet befallen her.

People are apt to smile at jealousy as though it were rather a diverting little weakness of our fellow-creatures, and yet, surely, there can be few amongst us who have not at some period in our lives been able to form a faint conception of what the pain of it may be.' To be a little jealous is



a very uncomfortable and disagreeable feeling, but to be madly, wildly jealous ! that, indeed, must be an agony that ought to call forth the tenderest sympathy for the sufferer—the bitterest indignation against the wanton inflicter. Say a man loves a woman or a woman a man with his or her whole heart and soul. After all, it is simpler to take one case than two, so I will take the woman's case, and the reader may adapt the pronoun to suit his own feelings or circumstances. Say, then, that a woman loves a man with all her heart and soul. Alienate his affection from her—let his eyes, where she has been wont to read love, become cold and wandering, the pressure of his hand, that has been a language to her heart, careless and indifferent—offer her the love of handsomer, better-born men ; give her all gifts the world can bestow—will she thank you ?—will she take them in exchange ? Not only alienate his love from her, but give it to another woman—let her see his

eyes fixed with passion on a rival, his hand seeking hers, and can you then conceive a more cruel agony ! Yet it is in describing a torture like this that people say smiling to each other, "Oh ! you know, she is so dreadfully jealous of her husband ;" or, "He is frantically jealous of her."

Not very long ago there appeared in the columns of the *Times* the trial of an Italian for murder, which must have given to most of us some conception of what the awful moral torture of jealousy must be. It was a tale as moving as that of Othello—more so since the unhappy wretch had absolute proof of the guilt of her whom he loved. I have almost forgotten the details now, but they were something like these—the reader will doubtless be able, if I am wrong, to correct me from his better memory.

A man married a wife whom he tenderly loved. Some time after their marriage he was sent to prison, (I fancy for some political offence). During his absence she was

unfaithful to him. It came to his knowledge, but after many supplications and promises on her part, he forgave her. For years all went well with them—he loved her with the same adoration—then he received a warning that she was again untrue to him. At first he would not believe—then he began to see that he had cause for suspicion. Nothing could be more pathetic than the description of his agony—his alternate hope, doubt, fear, anguish. Unable longer to endure such torture, he laid a trap for his wife. To all appearance she issued innocent from it, and his heart was divided between tumultuous joy at the dispersing of his fears, and remorse for having suspected her. At this moment he meets his Iago, (a woman this time), who laughs at his false confidence, and shows him how he has been duped.

Filled with madness, he sends for his wife's lover, and pushing them both into a cellar, stabs them, and then gives himself up

to the police. The lover is killed—the woman survives, and when the wretched husband sees her in Court, as a witness against him, and hears her guilt proved beyond a doubt, his senses give way, and he becomes a raving madman.

And yet people laugh at jealousy!

Rhona, then, was jealous, and though with comparatively slight cause, she suffered cruelly. The fact that she was neither looking nor feeling her best, and that she was completely unable to enter the lists with Mrs. Vernon, added to the poignancy of her distress. Like most women of her temperament, she could not do, think, or feel by halves. She could not reason to herself that her husband was temporarily amused by Mrs. Vernon, without his real affection for herself being in any way impaired. No ; she told herself that he no longer loved her, and that his love was transferred to the lovely widow. After all, it is not to be wondered at that maids and wives should

feel the rancour they are supposed to entertain against widows. These last are very dangerous and seductive persons sometimes.

With the want of tact that characterises all sincere lovers of both sexes, Rhona, instead of exerting herself to be more charming and agreeable to the object of her affections, was cold, reserved, and sullen, and gave herself the airs of an injured wife. An older woman, with more experience of the world, would have known how fatal a course this was. Does not a man fly from the woman who frowns upon and finds fault with him, to the one who smiles upon and flatters him?

Rosalind sees with deep distress how matters stand between the pair whom she had so strenuously insisted on making happy, and suffers not a little. First she tries to procure an eligible man visitor for her sister-in-law, but the fates are against her—every man she asks is otherwise engaged. Then she remonstrates with Ella. She is very

fond of her for her own sake, as well as because she is Charlie's sister, and she speaks very sweetly and gently to her about the pain she is causing Rhona.

Ella opens her innocent blue eyes wide.

"My dear Rosy—how can you be so absurd! What is Colonel Dorian to me? I suppose I must talk to some one and he is pleasant and amusing. *Entre nous*, I rather pity him with that wife of his. Forgive me, dear—I forgot for the moment that she is your cousin."

"Indeed, Ella, you do her great injustice. There does not exist a brighter, more affectionate, loveable creature than Rhona—but she is so dreadfully in love with her husband that it is real suffering to her to see him devote himself to another woman—I am sure I should have felt the same if Charlie had neglected me so soon after our marriage, and indeed, I feel very much disgusted with Colonel Dorian and think him extremely heartless."

"You would not have been so silly, my dear. You know there is nothing so fatal as for a woman to chain her husband to her car and drag him about everywhere like a wretched captive."

Mrs. Vernon does not see fit to mend her ways, even though her brother, who feels sincerely sorry to see Rhona suffering, and who yet has all a man's horror of interfering, speaks a word in season to her.

Presently the climax comes. One evening when they have been about ten days at the Manor House, Rhona is sitting on a sofa pretending to look over some photographs. She does not really see them, but, foolish girl ! is straining her ears to hear what her husband and Mrs. Vernon are whispering about on the couch behind her. At last, unfortunately for her, her ear gets sufficient acuteness, and she catches the following sentences—

COLONEL DORIAN. Won't you come out with me to-morrow morning in the wood?

We are not going to shoot. Charlie has to ride into B——.

MRS. VERNON, (*coquettishly*). I don't know. I am not sure that it would be quite proper.

COLONEL DORIAN, (*reproachfully*). What ! cannot you trust yourself with *me* ?

MRS. VERNON. But what will your wife say ?

COLONEL DORIAN. I don't care. What does it matter !

MRS. VERNON. She will be dreadfully angry if she finds it out.

COLONEL DORIAN. Let her ! She is bound to make herself disagreeable about something. Her temper is too infernal.

Now if Rhona had not listened, she would not have incurred the dire pain of hearing these cruel words. No doubt husbands and wives often make little confidences about each other to sympathising ears, but as it does not come to the knowledge of their partner, why, no harm is done. We

may be sure that Colonel Dorian would rather have given up that hundred pound bank-note than that Rhona should have heard what he was saying, but the possibility of such a thing never occurred to him. He was besides just a little bit deaf, as many men are in the shooting season.

CHAPTER XI.

WAS IT HER FAULT?

RHONA could bear no more. She started up and rushed from the room, terrifying Rosalind, whom she passed on her way to the door, by her wild, grief-stricken expression. In a moment, the latter laid aside her embroidery and followed her cousin, reaching her door just before she had time to shut and bolt it. Rhona was beyond concealment now—she threw herself into a chair and gave way to the most violent fit of sobbing. Rosalind was distracted—she did not know what was the matter but felt that it was something quite beyond the reach of sal-volatile or brandy.

She could only implore her to be calm—but poor Rhona was utterly unable to comply with this entreaty, however urgently expressed.

At last her sobs became a little less violent, and in reply to Rosalind's questions as to what had so distressed her, she was able brokenly to repeat the dreadful dialogue that had reached her ears. In the desolation of her ravaged heart, she felt as if all was over between George and herself—their hearts were for ever alienated—perhaps it would come to their lives being separated too. And at this dreadful thought she is again convulsed by so violent a grief that Rosalind is fairly terrified. I can quite fancy how disgusted and impatient many readers who have had ten thousand times greater provocations than Rhona and borne them with a smiling face, or at all events in silence, will feel with my heroine, but it is not always actual facts that distress us most, but the way in which they present them-

selves to our minds. And to Rhona, the few thoughtless words spoken by her husband, and not seriously meant, seemed to her the expression of his real sentiments, which were weariness, contempt, and disgust. And this was the lover of last year whose love was "warranted" eternal.

Rosalind was furious with Colonel Dorian —she would have liked to punish him indignantly on the spot, to have wrung his heart with woe and remorse. As it was, in the midst of her alarm and distress about Rhona, she bethought herself of a little bit of revenge. She left her cousin for a moment and ran down to the drawing-room. George was still sitting whispering confidentially to Ella whilst Charlie was reading the paper at the other end of the room. Mrs. Granville swoops down upon them with an impetuosity quite unusual to her.

"Colonel Dorian, unless you wish your wife to die, I think you had better send for the doctor. Perhaps you would like to go

for him yourself—he ought to come at once."

George looks up at her amazed. It seems to him only five minutes since Rhona was sitting on the sofa in front of him, and what means this anger in the eyes and voice of his hostess?

"It seems," says Rosalind, quivering with indignation, "that our poor child has overheard some cruel and disparaging remarks that you have been making about her to Mrs. Vernon, and she is so dreadfully unhappy in consequence that she is in violent hysterics. I should not wonder if she were to be seized with convulsions."

Colonel Dorian turns very pale.

"I will go for the doctor at once," he mutters, and turns hurriedly to leave the room. Perhaps the instinct of an affectionate husband would have been to rush upstairs to his wife, but George's only idea was to get away from what promised to be a very disagreeable scene. So he went in

all haste for the doctor, who lived just outside the Park gates, and returned with him in a very short space of time.

Meanwhile, as soon as he had left the room, Rosalind turned sharply upon her sister-in-law.

“I cannot conceive, Ella, how you can be so heartless. You little know what injury you may have done to poor Rhona—I think you have behaved most wickedly and cruelly.”

Sometimes when people feel guilty, they find the most convenient course to pursue is to turn upon their accusers. Ella, with a lovely carmine glowing in her cheek, says angrily,

“Oh, this is really too ridiculous! That dreadful woman seems to have a mania for making herself and everyone else wretched. I think the best thing for me will be to get out of the house as soon as I can.”

“I think it will,” said with flash-

ing eyes, and with that, she hastily returns to Rhona.

Mrs. Vernon begins to cry.

“I never thought,” she murmurs to her brother who has risen and is looking thoroughly perplexed and wretched, “I never thought it would come to my being turned out of your house.”

“No one wants to turn you out. You proposed to go, and upon my soul, I think, under the circumstances, it is the best thing you can do.”

“If she has counted upon his taking her part, she is doomed to find out her mistake,” Ella cries a little more audibly.

“You will end,” continues Charlie, vexed but indignant, “by doing serious harm to some one. What devil possesses you, Ella, that you must want to make every man you come across in love with you!”

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easiness," he says in his jovial tones. "I have given Mrs. Dorian a soothing draught and she must have perfect quiet. To-morrow I make no doubt she will be quite herself again."

Colonel Dorian has to put on the manner of an affectionate husband, to feign great interest and to thank the doctor warmly. Knowing his candid nature, we may imagine how disagreeable it is to him to play this part. In the sincerity of his heart, he would have liked to go to Rhona and pour out all the vials of his wrath upon her, threaten a separation, make her beg Mrs. Vernon's pardon—and so on. Instead of this, he has to go about in a hang-dog way like some guilty wretch, or, rather, like a kicked hound. He inquires sullenly of Rosalind, who has come to the foot of the stairs, whether he shall go to Rhona, and she replies with extreme coldness,

"No—much better not. She must not

be agitated. I shall remain with her until she is asleep."

After this, Colonel Dorian retires to the smoking-room to Charlie. Men are not given to lecturing or interfering with each other, so Captain Granville, (though in his heart thinking his friend has behaved very badly), hands him a cigar and makes a remark upon something in the paper. Presently their cigars have a soothing effect upon them and they fall to talking about sport, but there is still a little awkwardness between them. Colonel Dorian is longing to launch into bitter vituperation against matrimony but feels that he will not have a sympathising auditor.

It is nearly midnight when Rosalind comes downstairs and announces that Rhona is fast asleep and that all is well with her. Colonel Dorian, who has never in his life liked his hostess so little, feels it incumbent upon him to offer her some thanks for her kindness to his wife, and then he continues,

“I am extremely sorry she should be so unwell, but I am really rather at a loss to know how I am answerable for it as you hinted some time ago.”

It is rather unwary of him to give Rosalind this chance—she takes immediate advantage of it.

“Of course,” she says, “you must be perfectly aware of what you said to Ella. It was very cruel and unjust to say it at all, but surely you might have been careful not to say it in Rhona’s hearing.”

Colonel Dorian knows that he has said several things to Ella not altogether suited for publication on the house-top, but he has no idea what the particular remark may be that has drawn down all this fury and misfortune upon his devoted head.

“Really,” he says, “I do *not* know to what you are alluding.”

Rosalind does not believe in his pretended ignorance, and says with some warmth,

“You asked Ella to go into the wood

with you, and she replied that your wife would be angry, and then you said, 'What did it matter? You did not care. She had an infernal temper, and was bound to be disagreeable about something.' All I can say is," proceeds Rosalind indignantly, "if her temper has become bad, it is you who have made it so. A sweeter disposition than hers I never knew. And as I helped to make this match—as it was to me you came to plead your cause when you were so much in love," (with slight sarcasm), "and declared you could not exist without her, it is natural that I should feel dreadfully unhappy that it has not turned out better."

"Of course," replies Colonel Dorian turning like the traditional worm, "if a woman is unjust and jealous and exacting, it is enough to alienate any man's affection."

"Oh!" returns Rosalind with flashing eyes, "you think it quite right and justifiable for a man to make love to another woman before his wife's eyes, and to utter disparag-

ing remarks in her hearing. If I had known those were your sentiments last year, I should most certainly not have advocated your cause."

Colonel Dorian, feeling that he is likely to come off second best in this encounter, relapses into silence, and Rosalind, not wishing to prolong the discussion, and content with her last word, goes out of the room.

Then Colonel Dorian takes up his parable, and denounces marriage and women with all the bitterness of which he is full, and Charlie, worried and perplexed, feeling angry with his friend, but not wanting to quarrel with him, and thinking, too, that he has been somewhat severely handled, smokes on in silence, only expressing his dissent and annoyance by occasional short, vigorous puffs. When he finally retires to rest, Rosalind is sitting up for him—Rosalind, unwonted sight! in tears. Anyone might imagine, to see her, that she had driven this couple to the altar at the sword's point,

and that she considers their misery sealed for ever.

"It will come all right, little woman," says Charlie soothingly. "'The quarrels of lovers,' you know. It was very unlucky poor Rhona hearing what he said. I don't suppose he meant it. People should shut their ears, not open them, when they expect to hear unpleasant things. I think you were quite right to take Master Gustav to task about it, but now, if you'll act on my advice, you will let the matter drop, and advise Rhona to do the same."

Rosalind turns a grieved face to him.

"What do you suppose I should feel if I heard you say such cruel things?" she asks.

"You never will, my darling," he answers kissing her fondly. "There is only one woman in the world for me, thank God! But upon my word, Rosy, I did not know there was so much of the Turk in you. Positively I felt quite cowed and frightened when you attacked Gustav."

"I am afraid I was rather hard upon him," replies Rosalind. "And oh ! Charlie, I am so sorry about Ella. I don't like her to go away."

"Oh ! let her go—there will be no peace while she stays. And, for Heaven's sake ! never let us have her here again without providing legitimate sport for her."

"But I did," says Rosalind. "It was dreadfully unfortunate his being called away."

"Have two next time, in case of accident," remarks Mr. Granville laughing.

Rhona wakes next morning with a dreadful sense of oppression. It is some few moments, being under the influence of the opiate, before she can remember what the trouble is that weighs so heavily upon her. Then with a shamed, humiliated feeling, she recalls the scene of last night and her husband's cruel words. Did he really mean them ? Oh, impossible ! what had she ever done to make him think and speak so bit-

terly of her? She longs to see him—she hopes that he will come and tell her that he is sorry—that she must not think any more of his foolish words—that he did not mean them. But when he does come to see her, he only asks with ice-cold politeness after her health ; then goes to the window, looks out for some minutes in silence, and finally making for the door, inquires whether he shall send her maid to her.

Rhona replies in the negative. She is alone again, and a deadly chill steals round her heart. This then is the very last chapter of her romance—her hopes are dead—the only future that lies before her is a cold, lonely, loveless one. At this grievous thought, she is fain to break again into bitter tears, but makes a mighty effort. She is quite determined not to have any repetition of last night's weakness. It is true, alas! that her husband no longer cares for her ; that he is indifferent alike to her anger or sorrow ; that he looks upon her as

a taskmaster, and would fain cast his chains from him. Oh! if she could but tear him from her heart! if she could cease to love him as he has ceased to love her! if she could find consolation in the smiles and kind words of other men! But no! she will never be able to do that. Her heart has but one lord—there exists only one man who can deal pain or pleasure to her as he lists. Even now, if he had but said a few kind words to her, she would have flown to his arms ready to believe anything he chose to tell her, only asking to be blinded, deluded, deceived, if that were kinder than the truth. But this consolation is not afforded her. Colonel Dorian treats her with chill politeness—makes no allusion to the past, and keeps out of her way and Rosalind's as much as possible. For he is vindictive, as a great many good-tempered people are, and does not readily forgive. He goes out shooting all day and every day whether Mr. Granville bears him company or not—he is

neither sullen nor sulky—talks to Rosalind at dinner in his usual cheery manner, but there is no possibility of mistaking that his feelings towards the inmates of the Manor House are different from those with which he entered it. Of a night, he sits smoking with Charlie and adjourns from the dining to the smoking-room to read the papers. He talks a good deal of his affairs to his friend, always putting them in the most gloomy light. He speaks of the embarrassments he has undergone since his marriage ; of his wife's extravagance and utter ignorance of how to manage a house or to economise—never does he bestow one word of praise upon her or speak of her efforts at reform, or the sacrifices to which she has consented. He dwells on the wretchedness of living in London, (and here Mr. Granville sympathises heartily with him), and he talks quite pathetically of his aspirations after sport and change and travel.

Charlie is dreadfully sorry for Rhona,

but he would be more than mortal if he did not feel a melancholy complacency in thinking that his predictions have been fulfilled to the letter. He is careful, however, to say little or nothing to Rosalind about the subject of the long conversations that he and Gustav have together.

Rhona behaves very differently. Although she and Rosalind are bosom friends, and connected by ties of blood, she carefully abstains from talking about her domestic affairs, and especially from censuring her husband. After the confidences which she had been betrayed into on that memorable night, she has resolved never to show her weakness to mortal eyes again—it is impossible for a woman who really loves a man to blame or speak against him except in the heat of passion and outraged pride. The sympathy of other people with her against the man she loves is bitter and abhorrent to her, just as it is agreeable when she dislikes or is indifferent to him. If the subject

cropped up, (and Rosalind, the least inquisitive of her sex, would fain have talked of Rhona's married life in the hope of giving her comfort or advice), Rhona always took the blame to herself—spoke of her own ignorance or foolishness, or laid the blame upon her health, nerves, irritability, which must be trying to any man. She hoped to be different by and by. And Rosalind, though a little vexed with her, could not but in her heart applaud Rhona's loyalty.

Colonel Dorian, becoming extremely bored with his prolonged stay at the Manor House, found that it was necessary to go to London on business. Once there, he did not hurry back, but wrote to his wife that he was invited to a big shoot in Norfolk and another in Suffolk, and had accepted both. He would be back in time to take her home the first week in November.

When that time came, Rhona was by no means sorry to return to her Lares and Penates—in fact, she was growing terribly

home-sick. And she thought and hoped that once more alone with her husband, she might regain some influence over him and win back part at least of his estranged affection. She was determined to strain every nerve to please him—she meant to be very economical—she would *try* not to be hurt and jealous when he made himself agreeable to other women.

One of her first visitors after her return was Colonel Ormond, and she was genuinely glad to see him; he seemed quite like an old, old friend—the only little thing that stood between them was the embarrassment she felt at his having lent her husband money after her confidences to him in Scotland. But he always showed such hearty friendship for George that there was no reason why anyone should think he had been actuated by any other motive than the wish to oblige him. George's wife certainly never entertained any different idea. Three or four times in the club, Jack had given

Colonel Dorian boxes for the theatre, telling him that he had a friend who gave them to him for nothing.

Rhona was exceedingly fond of the theatre. Jack was secretly horrified to find that she had no carriage; and one day said to his friend,

“I am going off in a day or two to Melton—I shall leave one servant and my brougham-horse in town; it is an infernal nuisance to have horses and servants eating their heads off and doing nothing. I wish, Gustav, like a good fellow, that you and Mrs. Dorian would make use of the brougham till I come back. If you don’t mind, I shall tell my servant to go to you for orders every morning.”

And George, who was always pleased to think he had devoted friends who would do anything in the world for him, readily acceded to Colonel Ormond’s request and accepted the obligation with the best grace in the world. So Rhona had her after-

noon drives again which she had missed sadly, though she would not admit it. If Colonel Ormond did come to town occasionally, he never appeared at their house except on a Sunday, when he was not likely to have occasion for his brougham.

On the twenty-fourth of December there was an announcement in the first column of the *Times* concerning the wife of Lieutenant-Colonel Dorian.

Rhona had a daughter, which, to her unutterable grief, only survived its birth a few hours. She had cherished such great hopes and longings about this little being, and the disappointment was grievous to her. George behaved very nicely and kindly upon the occasion, and endeavoured to show sympathy, but in his secret heart he was rather relieved. Children are such an awful expense and such a tie. So the nursery was turned back into a spare bedroom, and in due course Rhona dried her tears and became consoled.

CHAPTER XII.

JACK'S DOUBT.

“YOU never come to see me now. You
are quite a stranger.”

“Oh, I’ve been a good deal out of town,
hunting and visiting about, and when I did
come up, it was only for a few hours at a
time, and I had ten thousand things to do.”

The speakers are Jack and Nella. He is
paying her a visit this February afternoon.
A little bitter feeling goes through Nella’s
heart. If a man really wants to see a wo-
man, he will always put off anything else to
do it—hunting, of course, excepted. There
is only one man in the world whose going
or coming makes much difference to Nella,

and that is the man who at the present moment occupies the cosy chair by the fire opposite to her. She has great tact and experience, and is no longer very young, and she knows that it is a fatal mistake for a woman to show pique at a man's neglect—it is the most certain way *not* to bring him back. A woman who can always smile, give him a cheery welcome, and look glad when he comes—that is the sort of woman a man likes. And Nella can do this to perfection. All the same, she is a little bitter at heart, because she does care for Jack. She has a vague, scarcely acknowledged consciousness that if he were ever seriously to ask her to be his wife, not in the half-laughing, half-earnest manner that he has already done once or twice, but as a man asks who believes that his happiness or misery depend on a woman's answer, that she would not resist his appeal, in spite of her vows against a second marriage. But now, she feels, he has quite

gone from her ; until the present time, she has never had a serious rival in his affections, and although he has made no confidences to her, she can see, or fancies she can see, into his heart as though he carried a window in his breast. Many men do carry windows in their breasts ; they do not pull up the blind for everyone, but there is generally some one who has the privilege of gazing in, and not unfrequently it is the person to whom the sight is the most painful. I do not fancy that the most tactless woman in the world sits and talks by the hour to a man who cares for her about another man, but this is what men constantly do. Perhaps it is because men have less conceit than women, and are less ready to imagine themselves beloved. It is certain that Jack, who believed in and valued Nella's friendship immensely, never dreamed for a moment that she loved him.

Rhona's name was quite as odious to Nella as ever Nella's had been to Rhona.

But she did not exhibit her feeling by showing pique or indifference when the rival's name was mentioned, or by being cold to her when they met. It was a dreadful trial to her that she could not talk about Mrs. Dorian's health, her looks, her happiness, her husband, her children, her occupations, her distaste for her charms—it almost reconciled her to not seeing much of him. Of course she knew that he was in love with his wife, and she knew too that, even if he had admitted it to himself, which she doubted, he would indignantly have refuted the suggestion that it had been suggested to him by anyone else. But she was the last woman to suspect it. She thought she could have done better if it had been any other woman than Rhona, whom she really could not think nice or charming. But Nelly, though she was, failed to realise the importance of the matter who the woman is that he

heart you desire, she must be of all her sex the most distasteful to you.

"I want to hear all about the people at Valentine," says Jack. "When did you come up?"

"On Monday. What shall I tell you about them?"

"Everything. What you think of Deloraine—whether Rue is happy, and all particulars."

"Sir Everard is very nice. I never saw anything like his devotion to Rue. He simply worships the ground she walks on. Of course, being so fond of Val, I was a little prejudiced against him at first, but that soon wore off."

"And Rue?"

"Rue is radiant. I really think I never saw so lovely a creature as she is now. She is fuller than ever of her quips and pranks and wiles, and Sir Everard seems to think everything she does, even when she

plays her saucy tricks upon him, perfection."

"And has Ruth taken to him?"

"Yes, Lady Valentine has quite taken to him. But he treats her so charmingly, that it would be impossible for her not to like him. There is only one person who is entirely proof against him."

"And that, I suppose, is Bab?"

"Yes, poor little Bab. She seems to hate him with a violence that one can scarcely credit—she will not speak a civil word to him—will not allow him even to help her to anything at lunch or dinner, and would rather fall than take his hand to get out of the carriage. He tried all he knew to propitiate her, but in vain, and now he finds the only plan is to leave her quite alone. Her mother told me that one day he asked her why she would not be reconciled to him, and she answered, 'Because I love Val. I hate you, for you are a thief and a robber—you have stolen

what belonged to him and you have made us all wretched by driving him away. But I daresay something will happen to you or Rue because you have both been false and dishonourable — people always get punished, even in this world.'"

"Poor little Bab!" says Jack. "What a pity my brother did not leave the place to her in case of Rue refusing to marry Val — then everybody might have been happy."

"Oh, no," replies Nella, shaking her head, "that would never have done. Fancy Val tied to a poor little sickly, fretful wife. And kind as he is to her now, he would have broken her heart if he had married her. I never saw so intensely jealous a disposition as hers. By the way, I had a letter from him yesterday."

"Had you? What did he say?"

"He wrote in the highest spirits. He had shot a tiger and was immensely proud and delighted. There was not a word about any of the Valentine people."

“ Youth soon forgets—mercifully,” observes Jack.

Then, with an abrupt change of tone,

“ Have you seen any of our mutual friends lately, Nella?”

“ We have so many,” replies Mrs. Orme maliciously. “ Can’t you particularise?”

“ Well,” (rather embarrassed), “ Gustav and his wife, for instance.”

“ I met them last night at Mrs. Blank’s ‘at home.’ ”

“ How was she looking?”

“ Oh, very well in health, but not particularly pleased; her husband was by way of devoting himself to a very pretty Mrs. Vernon—a widow.”

“ What an infernal shame it is,” breaks in Jack with warmth, “ that when a man has the sweetest, most charming wife in the world, he must want to be running after other women !”

“ I suppose,” observes Nella drily, “ that a man hates to be made to feel his chain. It

is a mistake for a woman to show that she is jealous."

"How can she help it?" cries Jack hotly — "if she is devoted to him heart and soul, how can she look on calmly and see him making love to another woman before her eyes? If I had a wife and was fond of her, do you suppose I should not be jealous of her?"

Nella would not be a woman if she did not feel bitter at seeing the man she cares for espouse another woman's cause so hotly.

"I did not know you had any Othello-like proclivities," she remarks with some coldness.

"I don't think I should be jealous without cause," he says; "but if I adored my wife, and she allowed other men to make love to her, and seemed to take more pleasure in their society than in mine, of course I should be jealous. I should be utterly wretched!"

"Mrs. Dorian should try a little flirtation

on her own account," remarks Nella who is bored with the subject. "I daresay that would have a good effect on her husband."

"She could not," replies Jack with strong emphasis—"she is too good—too pure!"

Mrs. Orme only betrays her exasperation by the working of one little foot; but as it is concealed beneath her gown, Jack is unable to take a hint from it.

"I don't know that Mrs. Dorian is always reasonable," she says. "Do you remember the little episode of the Royal Academy?"

Jack does not readily find an answer to this. After a slight pause he says,

"I am more convinced than ever that marriage is a mistake. Nothing would induce me to marry. I think, Nella, it's a tremendous proof of your wisdom that you have never repeated your error."

"Yes," answers Nella bitterly. "What man is worth wasting your heart on and making yourself wretched about?"

"Could a man make you wretched?" asks Jack quietly.

"Why ask? Am I not a woman?"

"Would you be unhappy if you loved him, and if you fancied he cared for some one else?"

"I should be miserable!" she answers in a low, concentrated voice.

"And yet," remarks Jack, "you blamed Mrs. Dorian for the same thing just now."

Nella is so furious at having been caught in this snare that she blushes crimson, and is obliged to rise and pretend to look for something on the table in order to conceal her confusion.

"Lady Chaloner was at the Blanks too," she says coming back to the fire with a hand-screen.

"Who is her last?" enquires Colonel Ormond.

"Young Belair of the Plume Theatre. She was quite engrossed with him all the evening."

“And how did Sir Philip like that?”

“He was not there; he very seldom goes out with her now.”

“Wise man!” remarks Jack. “It is much better not to put yourself in the way of seeing things that annoy you. Down at Valentine last summer she was flirting outrageously with Val. I suppose she has quite forgotten him by this time.”

“I told her last night that I had heard from him, but she did not seem in the least interested, and began to talk of something else. You see there was the Austrian Attaché after him, and now young Belair.”

“What a misfortune it is,” remarks Jack sighing, “that women are generally either too good or too bad.”

“I don’t think Lady Chaloner is bad,” protests Nella—“only vain and heartless.”

“*Only vain and heartless!*” cries Jack. “When the attributes that make a woman charming and loveable are purity, unselfishness, tenderness.”

“And yet,” says Nella with sarcasm, “your sex appears to set a far higher value on the former type of woman, if we may judge by the way you run after them, whilst the others are frequently neglected.”

“We are like the swine,” says Jack smiling, “throw us a pearl, and we trample it; give us carrion, and we revel in it.”

“Oh! Jack, what a disgusting simile.”

“It wasn’t very nice,” he admits. “But there is more truth in it than you might think for. Society is in a horrid bad way just now.”

“Fancy you setting up for a censor of the public morals,” smiles Nella. “You whose doctrine was that everybody ought to go his own way, and do what he liked.”

“Yes,” answers Colonel Ormond reflectively, “it is odd what different opinions one holds at different times.”

“I have never changed mine. Marriage has always been a sacred institution in my eyes. I have always thought it not only

wrong, but wicked, for a woman to be in love with a married man, or a man with a married woman."

Nella speaks more bitterly than is her wont—she is by no means uncharitably disposed. There is a pause, during which Jack looks ruminatingly at the fire. Then he says, sublimely unconscious that Nella has the key to his parable,

"Suppose a man only found his ideal woman when it was too late—when she was the wife of another man—what can he do?"

"Perhaps," remarks Nella, "she was once the ideal of the man she married. Nothing destroys an ideal like the rough contact of every-day life—to preserve the same feeling of worship and adoration, you ought to see your idol always in its niche in the temple. Habit destroys reverence—a sort of involuntary awe and devoutness comes over us when we enter a cathedral or a church, but if we slept and dined in it, do you suppose we should have any more feel-

ing for it than for an ordinary house? Which, being interpreted," laughs Nella, "means that the gilt soon comes off the gingerbread if you handle it, and that a man who is silly enough to look upon a woman as a goddess, is sure, if he marries and lives perpetually in her company, to find her, after a little time, even more ordinary than the rest of her sex."

"That may be his own fault," observes Jack.

"It may be," answers Nella drily.

"But," says Jack, harking back to his parable, "suppose a man does love a married woman, I don't know that he need incur that very sweeping censure you uttered just now. If he loves her devotedly—if her happiness is the dearest wish he has—if he *never* thinks unworthily of her, or even wants her to know that he loves her, what is the harm of that?"

"You are a man of the world," retorts Nella, "and know pretty much what your

sex is. Suppose, as you say, a man has built up all these delightful fancies about a woman—suppose he worships her in the pure and unselfish way at which you hint, and suppose, (and this I confess I am sceptical about), he has self-control enough to keep his feelings from showing themselves in his eyes or on his lips. She learns to regard him as her friend. One day he is alone with her—she becomes confidential—she tells him her troubles, her unhappiness, perhaps, confides to him her husband's cruelties, her own suffering, invites his sympathy—what then?"

"Well, what then?" and Jack fixes his eyes eagerly on her face.

Nella laughs a short, dry laugh.

"I don't think I need tell you. I have had some considerable experience in your sex, and my imagination supplies me with the rest."

"*You are wrong!*" and Jack rises from his chair and draws himself to his full

height, as though some inward consciousness of strength and nobility made him superior to an unworthy accusation.

"My dear Jack," exclaims Nella looking at him with innocent, surprised eyes, "you were only speaking of an imaginary case, were you?"

Jack comes rapidly down from his moral altitude, and feels rather small and humiliated. Is this his boasted discretion?

"No, no, of course not," he says hurriedly.

"Let us think of a few of the men we know," suggests Mrs. Orme ignoring his confusion—"there is nothing like being practical. Can you think of any man amongst our mutual acquaintances who is capable of behaving with so much heroism? —it would be heroism. For we must not forget that he adores this woman—that to be with her is the greatest happiness he knows, that she excites his love as well as his admiration, that she is young, and, I

suppose, according to his idea, pretty.”
(Poor Nella cannot help showing a little bit of the cloven foot.)

“*All that!*” (with emphasis).

“Well, what man do we know who could feel what you describe, and not, even under the trying circumstances I have imagined, let the woman guess his passion for her? Could —, or —, or —?” and she mentions the names of men they both know.

Jack shakes his head.

“Of course no one can tell until he is tried,” he says presently.

“That is just it,” returns Nella triumphantly. “No man *can* tell until he is tried. And if I had a friend likely to be placed in that position, I—”

Nella pauses.

“Well,” (eagerly), “what should you advise him?”

“I should advise him never to give himself the chance of discovering that he had overrated his own strength.”

"I don't quite understand you, Nella."

"I mean this," replies Mrs. Orme. "If a man has the misfortune to love the wife of another man—if he is a true and honourable man—if he really sets her happiness above his own, there is only one thing that he can prudently and consistently do."

"And that is?" asks Jack in an uncertain voice, dreading the opinion he is invoking.

"And that is to avoid her. Fly temptation—don't resist it. Talk about playing with fire!—that is an innocent and harmless amusement compared to playing with love. If, my dear, such a misfortune should happen to you, (and I trust it never may), as to be unlawfully in love, don't buoy yourself up with grand ideas of your own strength and honesty of purpose, but get out of the way of it. It is comparatively easy at first—once it gets a hold on you, it becomes impossible."

The room is quite dark now except for the fitful flames in the fire, but Nella's quick

eyes can read the pain in her friend's face. She is torn by conflicting emotions. She loves him ; if he loved her, for all the world she would not cause him one grain of bitterness ; but now that he loves another woman she cannot help feeling a little vindictive pleasure in making him suffer for his love. And he does suffer, because he knows that what Nella says is true, and that it would be nobler, more unselfish on his part to bid good-bye to his love than to stay by her, excusing himself for doing what pleased him best by false visions of benefiting her.

There is a long silence—Nella's vindictive feelings have vanished—there are tears in her eyes—it is in her heart to take his hand and say, “Oh, my love, is there no love fair in your eyes but the one that cannot be yours ?”

But it is for men to speak—women must be silent ; of their love at all events.

Colonel Ormond rises to go—she does not attempt to detain him.

“Good-bye, Jack,” she says, and her brown eyes look at him through a mist—“if you were ever troubled or unhappy, you would tell your old friend, would you not?”

He hesitates. For a moment he is minded to break into a confession—then he checks himself.

“Thanks, Nella,” he answers—“you know I would say more to you than to any living soul. Good-bye, my dear,” and with a kind and cordial hand-shake that from its very friendliness sends a pang through Nella’s heart, he goes.

“Why should he care for her?” she cries indignantly to herself when the door has closed upon him. “What is there in her to win such love and from such a heart as his? It is only because he cannot have her. That is the greatest charm a woman can possess in a man’s eyes!”

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.















